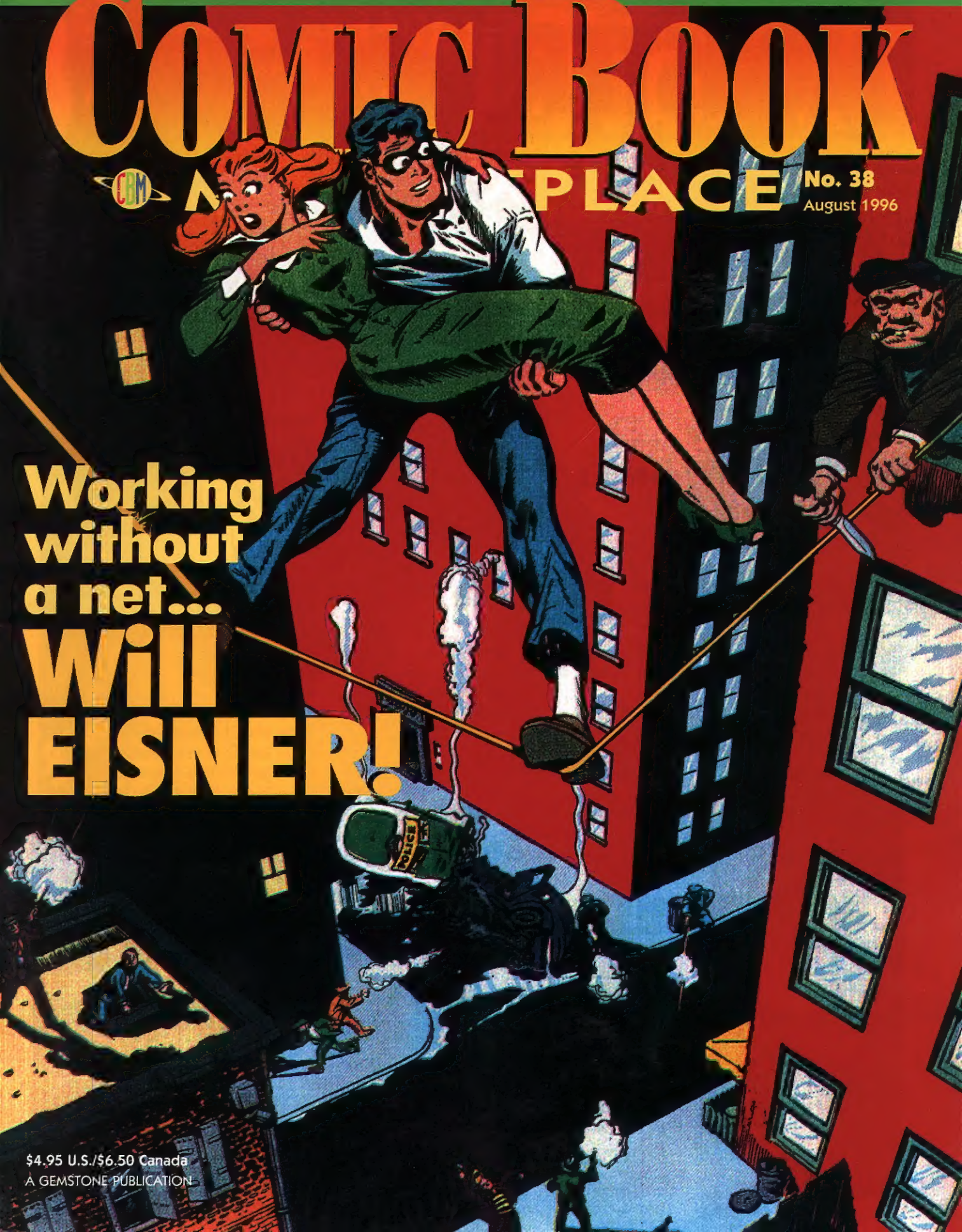
The Magazine for Golden Age & Silver Age Collectors!

COMIC BOOK MARKETPLACE

No. 38
August 1996



Working without a net... Will EISNER!

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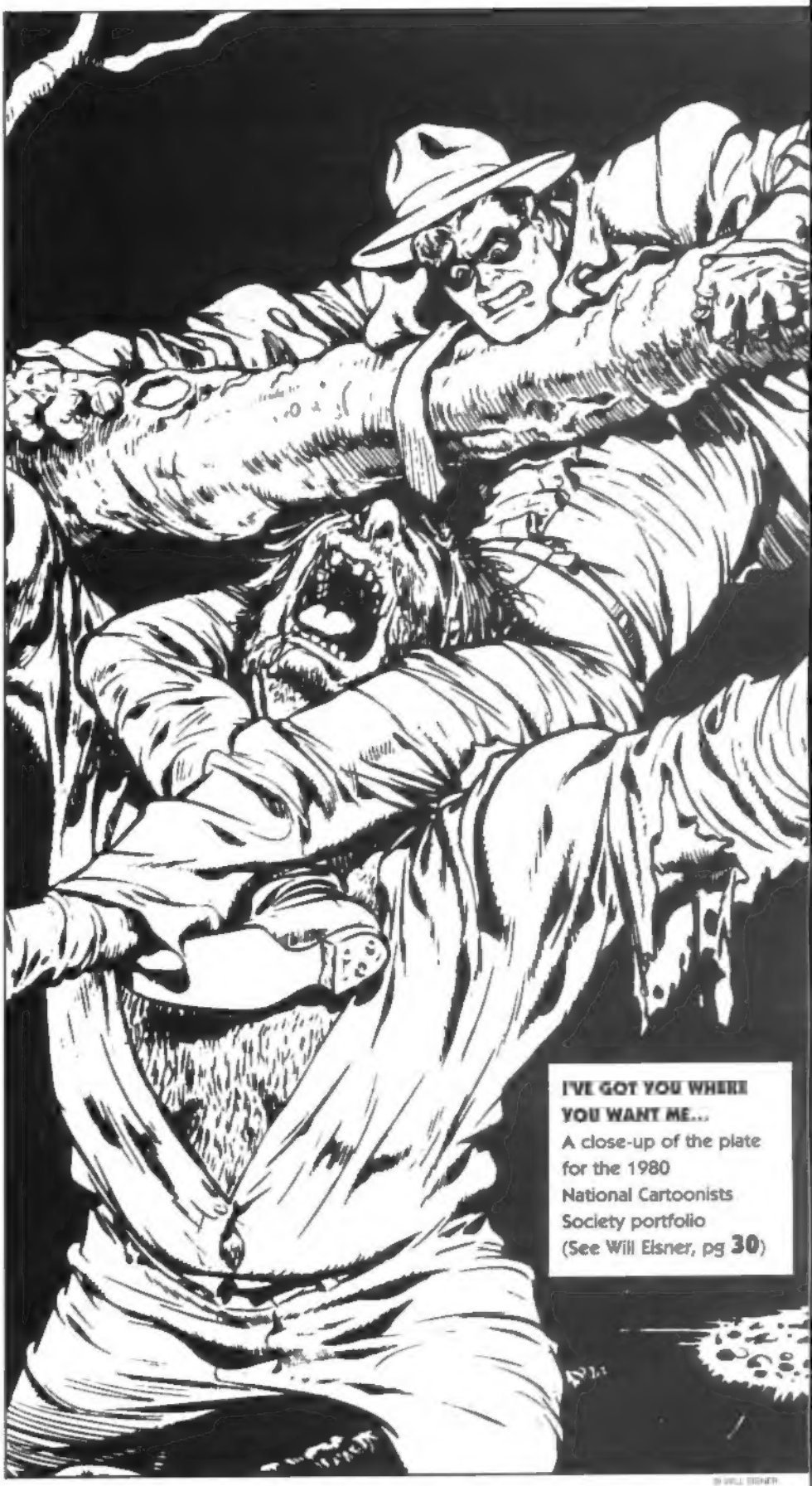
Issue Number #38, August 1996



I'VE GOT YOU WHERE YOU WANT ME...
A close-up of the plate for the 1980 National Cartoonists Society portfolio
(See Will Eisner, pg **30**)

© WILL EISNER

UBIQUITOUS BILL!

When I first became involved with organized fandom in the early 1960s, it seemed everywhere I turned I kept hearing the name Will Eisner. At the tender age of 12, I was only slightly capable of comprehending the historic importance of his contributions. Time passed, I grew, and so did fandom. The San Diego ComicCon started in 1970 and the name Will Eisner kept coming up everywhere. At the '72 SD Con I sat down with my new friend Bruce Hamilton, looked him square in the eye and asked him who he thought were the most important names in comic history. His long list started with the name Will Eisner. In a collecting world so loyal to DC and Timely, the fact that Eisner's name dominated so many ComicCon panels dealer's room discussions amazed me even more.

Just the other day I was asking friend and Golden Age expert Jon Berk about the Eisner legacy, and he pointed out a number of important concepts that bear repeating. Jon described some of William Eisner's contributions this way:

"Eisner is a "ubiquitous" creator of comic books from the earliest moments of the medium's birth. His earliest work appeared in an obscure publication called *Wow What a Magazine* published in 1936... and Eisner's earliest cover credit appeared on the ultra-rare second issue, which I believe you are showing in *CBM* #38 (in color) for the first time in fandom history. One cannot survey the early Golden Age without observing his indelible editorial and artistic imprint. He was the co-founder of The Eisner-Iger shop ... one of the earliest comic book shops. It gave birth to "Sheena" for *Jumbo Comics*. He also packaged *Jungle Comics* and *Planet Comics* for Fiction House.

Eisner's group created *Wonder Comics* and its infamous star, Wonder Man. Eisner is also credited with the creation of other legendary Fox titles including *Wonderworld Comics*, *Mystery Men*, *Fantastic Comics*, and *Science Comics*. This was all before his falling out with Victor Fox over the Wonder Man legal debacle.

From there Eisner gathered perhaps the greatest collection of Golden Age artists for Everett Arnold and Quality Comics. Industry giants like Lou Fine, Paul Gustavson, Reed Crandall, and Jack Cole top this legendary list of creators. That group saw the creation of Uncle Sam, Blackhawk, Doll Man, and so many others. Then Will Eisner developed his greatest creation, "The Spirit."

As if his editorial contributions were not enough, many of the most classic and collectible comic book covers of all time (as finished by Lou Fine and others) were said to be based on preliminary layouts and ideas provided by Eisner.

As for Eisner's artwork, even in 1937 his panel style already challenged the standards of conventional layout and design. "Muss 'em Up" in *Detective Picture Stories* #4 (March 1937) is an excellent example of this imaginative panel layout and shadowing."

As Jon Berk went through his narrative of Eisner achievements, I couldn't help thinking how accurate the term ubiquitous is... when describing the great Will Eisner! It seems that everywhere you look in the history of comics, Eisner is there, creating... contributing... writing... inventing... pioneering... and pushing the envelope. And all his efforts ultimately benefited comics and we who read them!

And so it is with the greatest pleasure and honor that we at *CBM* showcase this creative genius and "father" of sequential storytelling. I would like to personally thank you, "ubiquitous Bill" Eisner, for your immeasurable contribution to our beloved art form. Thanks for everything, Will... from one who really looks up to and embraces the real Eisner spirit!

Gary

Gary M. Carter, Editor

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Inquiring Minds Want To Know

I thought I was the only one who harbored an unnatural fetish for the squarebound 'giant' comics...! I've always had an appreciation for large-format books with more pages. I think it is the anthology-type lineup that so many of them carried that is appealing, in addition to the DC Annuals composed of reprints of stories I had never seen before. I was in heaven when DC was doing their 100-page Spectaculars, and I'm glad I kept all of mine. I've heard rumblings among dealers that these books—plus the 25¢ 'Bigger and Better' DCs of the early 70s are becoming increasingly in demand. But I just like seeing them stacked up, in all my anal-retentive glory, with those nice, white spines facing out. It's an affection that hasn't gone away, as I still catch myself picking up bookshelf-format comics and annuals of books I don't particularly care for—but just because they still are larger size. Hey, DC—how about bringing back the Justice League and Green Lantern quarterlies!!

Kudos on the Roy Thomas interview. Roy has been largely ignored by current comics fandom, which is criminal, as he did so much to guide and nurture the industry during the 70s. More important, people should know what a generous and honorable man he is in business, not always known for such. We coincidentally met while on a flight from St. Louis to New York in 1975. I was just starting my freelance writing career, and he immediately asked me to pen some articles for Savage Sword of Conan, which he was editing at the time. He was always very supportive, and even saw to it that I received more than the average word-rate for my articles. Working for Roy—which in itself was a thrill for me—was one of the most pleasant experiences of my career. He'll always be #1 on my list. It's always nice to see that someone, whose work you admire, is also a great guy as well.

I also appreciated the photo-features you ran on various events and collectors. This is a great change-of-page, and hope to definitely see more. Perhaps readers could submit photos of convention appearances of Golden/Silver-age greats, as well as features about their collections. Jon Berk—how about some reminiscences from you and other big-time collectors—on accumulating your collections, how it is displayed, etc. Inquiring minds want to know.

And special compliments for your cover. You could have just reproduced some comics covers for #35, but the special care and thought that went into your final product is the kind of thing that makes CBM stand above all the others! Again, congrats on another top-notch issue.

Sam Maronie, Missouri

I liked the cover too... kinda reminded me of those wonderful summer days with nothing to do but eat popsicles and read comic books...

Swirling Controversy

As usual, CBM digs the dirt that finds missing pieces of our comic book history. Detective Dan the first newsstand comic book? I can see the controversy swirling throughout fandom now! And I'm still trying to figure out whether Motion Picture Funnies Weekly #1 or Marvel Comics #1 was the first appearance of Sub-Mariner! "No Laughing Matter" has given us a very insightful look into the life and times of the early comic industry and its apparent effect on America during the early war days. Excellent issue!

Eric G. Blackmore, Tennessee

Just Does Not Wash

Found the latest issue of CBM (#36) a joy to read as usual. Being fascinated by the origin of all things I found the article by Douglas Gilbert to be extremely interesting. Some of the remarks reflected in the article about the state of the comic book industry are as applicable today as they were in 1942. I wonder, however, whether that *(Continued on page 8)*

core group of ten to twelve year olds, referenced as the marketing target, has been "abandoned" by today's publishers in the comic book marketplace.

The interview with Robert Bell brought back many memories. In 1973 when I happened to pick up an issue of Amazing Spider-Man by chance and saw that people actually sold back issues, it was Bell's ad that I first responded to. In fact, I lived only 30 minutes from Bell and made all my initial purchases of back issues at his home. He was always gracious. Although my tastes now focus on the Golden Age, I still have my Robert Bell Marvel checklist/catalogue. By the way, I know where three of those twenty thousand Marvel mania posters are; safely dry mounted in the ol' comic room.

I am going to wade again into this Motion Picture Funnies Weekly vs. Marvel Comics #1 controversy. I suggest, as set forth in my letter in Overstreet's Golden Age Quarterly #2, and as reflected in Matt Nelson's thorough summary of the issue, that whichever book saw the light of day first, I do not see how it can be questioned that the "Sub-Mariner" story was first published in MPFW. I'll throw in one additional fact not yet mentioned (as far as I know). The entire contents of MPFW is copyrighted by First Funnies, Inc., not by Timely Publications. Marvel Comics #1 is copyrighted by Timely Publications. Clearly, "The Sub-Mariner" was a property of First Funnies, Inc. until copyrighted by Timely. ("The Sub-Mariner" was registered as a trademark on Oct. 15, 1940 and stated as being continuously used since Aug. 31, 1939. Trademark applied for April 23, 1940.) As pointed out in my previous letter other contents of MPFW were contained in Marvel Mystery #2 (December 1939), Silver Streak #1 (December 1939), (copyrighted by Your Guide Publications) and Green Giant Comics (1940).

It does not make any sense that these two publishers, having paid for these characters and stories and copyrighted the contents, would allow First Funnies, Inc. not only to "reprint" the same stories, but would allow First Funnies to proclaim to the world that the contents were under their copyright. It just does not wash. The world just does not work that way. However, it is perfectly logical for First Funnies to "sell" the characters/contents to these two publishers. Whichever came first, MPFW still has a unique position in the Timely mythos.

Finally on this issue of choosing a name for the period from 1950-1955 as raised by Alan Bartholomew in a recent issue, I have always been fond, as you and I have discussed, of the term "Dark Age". Thematically the content of many books was "dark"er-horror and crime. With the crusade of Dr. Wertham and the Senate hearings it was, indeed a "dark" time for comic books. Ostensibly, this was a "dark age" for comic books as the superhero was dead and, seemingly, nothing occurred. However, as with the "Dark Age" of medieval times much creative and important work was produced in the era. Although a misnomer in view of the latter statement, "Dark Age" works. As too with the Dark Age of medieval times, the Dark Age of comic books was followed with a renaissance with Showcase #4 which ushered in the Silver Age of comic books.

Jon Berk, Connecticut

Spidey #1 Scarcity

In this issues Forum, Robert Beerbohm takes issue with my assumption that 1,700 copies of Amazing Spider-Man #1 survive.

I base my assumption on Ernest Gerber's Photo-Journal Guide To Comic Books which assigned Amazing Spider-Man #1 a relative scarcity index of #4 (Average Scarcity. This index number indicates that there are about 1,000 to 2,000 in existence, or is about average for collectors' comics for 1933-1960). If Mr. Beerbohm is correct in his personal estimate of between 20,000 and 30,000, I think that is great news for some of the die-hard, up-and-coming Spider-Man collectors who thought that they would never have a chance to own a copy. Take heart, all of you Spidey fans out there. At any rate, most collectors would STILL rather own a copy of Amazing Spider-Man #1 (20,000 to 30,000 copies known to exist, according to Robert Beerbohm) to Motion Picture Funnies Weekly #1 (only eight copies known to exist, one near mint with white pages, the rest with brown pages, according to The Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide).

I think that Mr. Beerbohm raises a good point when he says that most copies live in private long term collection and never get offered for sale. My own personal copy is an apparent VF which I purchased from Wally's Comics in Kirkland, Washington, and I intend to have it buried with me when I eventually 'croak'.

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In conclusion, I think that it is fair to say that all we can offer is our opinions when it comes to Golden and Silver Age comics and how many there are in existence. All that we can do is to offer our best guess. Thanks, all.

John Mlachnik, Minnesota

Ranking The Greats

We're losing them. Siegel & Shuster are gone. L.B. Cole is gone. So is Jack Kirby and so many more of the legends of comics. These are the men who exerted almost as much influence over my early years as did parents and teachers. And sadly, I never had a chance to meet most of them. All the recent obituaries got me to thinking about the all-time greats, and how I, personally would rank them. Here's my list:

1. Siegel & Shuster. What can you say about the guys that started it all? Without their brilliant creation of Superman-- still the greatest comic character ever-- who knows if the industry would have developed as it did?

2. Bob Kane & Bill Finger. Batman is the quintessential non-powered character. Kane deserves legend status for the creation, but Bill Finger (Batman's finest writer) does too. Perhaps Jerry Robinson should be included as well. Kane's drawings were not technically sophisticated, but were moody, setting the stage for later greatness with Dick Sprang.

3. Carl Barks. In my opinion, Barks is the single most talented creator in comics history. He wrote, he penciled, he inked, he lettered; he existed in total obscurity. And yet, he never gave less than his best. Writing every story on two levels, he could satisfy the child's sense of wonder and the adult's need for comedy, satire and irony.

4. Wayne Boring and Stan Kaye. Just as Barks was the "good duck artist," so Boring was the "good Superman artist" to me. His cityscapes, his muscular Superman, his distinctive "S" emblem, all added to the excitement for any Superman tale, especially when inked by the incomparable Stan Kaye. (Note how much better Swan's work was when inked by Kaye.)

5. Dick Sprang and Charles Paris. Sprang was an early innovator with page layouts, and when combined with Paris inks, the drawings leaped off the page. His square-jawed Batman is still the standard for today's artists. Sprang's villains were rotten to the core (check-out his version of Two-Face) and his Gotham was a truly ominous and wondrous place. To date, only Jack Burnley comes close to the Sprang Batman.

6. Lee & Kirby. Since I grew up in the 50's and 60's, I was there for Fantastic Four #1, and The Hulk #1. Stan Lee and Jack Kirby are forever entwined in my mind. The early years of the Fantastic Four (especially with Joe Sinnott inks) are the highlight of the duo's creativity.

7. Will Eisner. An early innovator in comics, Eisner's splash panes are among the best the comics field has ever seen. He probably influenced more aspiring artists than anyone else.

8. John Stanley. Stanley's Little Lulu took what could have been a hackneyed concept, and transformed it into a classic. His stories had the ring of truth and took the reader on a neighborhood adventure even without the exotic locales of the Barks adventures. His artwork was simple but perfect for the series and influenced the later Lulu art team.

9. Murphy Anderson. The smooth lines of the Anderson pen would make any comic more handsome. But his drawing style became particularly associated with a few choice characters: Adam Strange, The Atomic Knights, The Spectre, Hawkman. When he inked, his style overpowered the pencils. And when he left a strip, it always declined.

10. Gardner Fox. One of the great writers of comics, Fox liked to take little known facts and build stories around them. He worked without receiving credit on many early comics, and later did outstanding work on the Silver Age Hawkman and many other characters.

There are many other legends such as Schomberg, Cole, Everett, Fine, and so on. But this is my personal top 10 — the creators I grew up with. What do you think?

By the way: On your "next issue" page, is that the Avenger and Tina? The pose is remarkably similar to a back cover illustration done by Steven Kelez for my old fanzine The Symbol. The original Kelez art is framed and still graces my wall. I enjoy the magazine. Keep up the good work.

Lynn Woolley, Texas

Afraid To Tell

Can't take it any longer! I must break my silence! I've been quietly enjoying your fine publication since issue #2. Ever since you sent Bob Pujol all those copies to pass out to friends, I've been hooked, I know, I know, I should of said something sooner to let you know. Like when I bought (what few I could find!) extra copies of the restoration issue (#6) to pass out to collectors, or how I love some of the great Golden Age covers you use (Hit #5, Suspense #8, etc.). I'm afraid to tell you what I'd like to see in the future because I enjoy reading all the articles I know nothing about! All I can promise is I'll try harder to let you know how I really feel. Hey, looks like a pretty good mag you got going! Your 4-color friend,

Jerry Stephan, Missouri

Thanks Jerry… CBM #2 bub? Wow, we go way back!

Ultimately Unresolvable

When I wrote a few months age to commend CBM on its attention to genres other than superheroes, I should have remembered the cliché, "Be careful what you ask for, you might get it." Love glut, baseball comics, Casper, Sabrina, Dell Giants; not the sort of topics that I would usually care about, but I confess to reading the articles about each one. More to my taste were the articles on Catman and L. B. Cole, but I find the first places I turn to in CBM are the Speak Out/Forum and the letters section. While the continuing debates concerning grading, pedigree books, and the historical value of Motion Picture Funnies Weekly are ultimately unresolvable and therefore probably pointless, I still find them entertaining, and can no longer resist adding my opinions to the mix.

As to which came first, MPFW #1 or Marvel Comics #1, let's get to the real question. If you Sub-Mariner collectors could only have one of the two aforementioned books in your collection, which would it be? I thought so, just consider that Human Torch origin a bonus.

What makes a pedigree book? I don't have the comic buying budget to answer that question, but if I have the choice between a sharp VF copy of a given book for $250 and a 'pedigree' copy of the same for $1,000, I'm still going to have $750 left to spend!

The most contentious topic seems to be grading. Split grades? Like them or not they're here to stay, especially when the value of a book doubles from one full grade to the next. Personally, when I've bought split grade books through the mail, they've usually been what I imagine, and while occasionally a dealer might grade one book VG+ and another in similar condition as VG/FN, we've all found a greater discrepancy between two dealers grading the same book. As for split grades being a

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sneaky way of including the next higher grade, I'm more suspect of a VF- than I am of a FN/VF, minus grades being a stronger indicator of wishful thinking than split grades, (though I do agree with you about the misuse of VF/NM, does anyone out there really believe there is such a thing as NM-?).

J. Keith Contarino is on the money when it comes to true price ratios for Silver Age. As a collector, not a dealer, I am consistently able to purchase Silver Age reading copies at conventions, in VG to FN condition for the GD price listed in Overstreet. Ironically as Silver Age price ratios ever widen, they recently seem to be narrowing for a lot of high demand Golden Age and pre-Code books, the result of collectors willing to pay a premium for these books regardless of grade, and the grade more likely to be lower than higher.

This observation leads me to Stephen Kelsman's letter complaining about price in relation to condition. If as a collector, condition is of minor importance, and if you believe that lower grade Golden Age are undervalued in relation to high grade Silver Age you should be rejoicing rather than complaining; the more collectors fighting over pedigree books, the less competition for low grade books. If only it were so.

A final note to those Dick Sprang fans who haven't bought a new comic off the rack in twenty years, check out the covers he did for Detective #622-#624. They are hands down his best stuff. Thanks for a great magazine,

Richard Byard, California

Went Nuts

I'd like to make a few comments about issue #36. I very much enjoyed the article entitled "No Laughing Matter" that you reprinted from 1942 daily issues of the New York World-Telegram. As time passes, it becomes more and more difficult to get accurate information on the history of comics, but here we have the opportunity to read what was written at the time it was happening. I loved the information about Wonder Woman! And everyone at AC Comics went nuts over the photograph of Charles Biro and his pet, Squeeks. Having reprinted some of the classic Biro Crimebuster and Iron Jaw stories, the monkey has become a favorite. When the "revived" Crimebuster appears in the 90's as a support character in our monthly action title, Femforce, Squeeks is there, too.

One feature that puzzled me in this issue was the Rulah article by Stephen Gentner. I can't help but think he is reading way too much into the whole thing... maybe he was kidding? Fox had some very sexy female lead characters... that much I agree with. But I see a distinction between "sex" and "sexy". Every jungle character, male or female, from every company, not just Fox, wore skimpy outfits supposedly made from animal skins... whatever was available in the wild. The idea of surviving in the jungle with minimal clothing and no shoes (or simple lightweight leather sandals or moccasins) is silly, but this is, after all, fiction.

The jungle stories from all the companies were pretty much the same. The African natives were assumed to be lacking in formal education, possessing many tribal traditions in dress and ceremony etc., in all popular literature of the day. While it is true, as Steve points out, that the African natives were typecast, it was the same in every company's books. And while it is true that Matt Baker was a young Afro-American artist, I don't believe he ever drew Rulah. The faces and hair look kind of like his and the layouts have that Baker flair, but many other Baker details are missing. As far as we can discern, Jack Kamen never drew any Rulah stories, only some of the covers. Also, in the vain of factual information, the recent sales data provided on page 45 gives a sales price for issues #13 and #14, but we don't know which #13 and #14, since there were two of each in the run.

And all the talk of lesbianism and weird male readers getting off on the idea of a Jungle dominatrix. If Rulah had not seemed to be a powerful goddess to the natives, might she not have been killed? If it had been a male character, would he be perceived as gay?

Then there is the sex and violence that Steve discusses. Rulah was certainly one of the more violent of the jungle book titles and she was a sexy looking woman, but I don't know of any actual sex acts. I don't think there was ever any nudity... any touching... any actual or suggested sex acts in the book. There certainly is today. And here lies one of my biggest complaints about the article. Steve says, "Compared even to today's jaded and violent fare, Fox's postwar body of work is still racy and smutty stuff! But in 1950, forget it... Fox

books were practically pornography!" He has obviously not looked at the volume of comic book material in the market of the '90's. Rulah would be like a PG-13 film. But, I certainly agree with Steve that the title was all about SALES. Aren't they all? Much ado about nothing.

Rebekah Black, Florida

In Steve's defense, he thoroughly discussed the content of his article ahead of time… and I asked him to expand on a few things and to even make some rather controversial conjectures within the framework of his own inimitable style. Therefore, a goodly portion of the responsibility in this area lies squarely on Ye editor's editorial shoulders. As for Squeaks the monkey… is there more background on this historic primate that the nice people at AC Comics could share with CBM readers? If so, please do!

All-Star Repro

I am writing in response to a letter you printed in Marketplace Mail from CBM #35. Felix Lugo wrote in regarding an All-Star #3 repro. I have an All-Star Comics #1 repro that fits the same description:

7 1/4 X 10 1/4 color cover with black and white interior art/text. If you look in the inside cover it states that the book is titled Flashback, a publication of special edition reprints, published about 1972? Do you think these are the same books? The book states that this was reprint issue #22. Do you have any information on this publication and what else was reprinted? I would be very interested to know! Keep up your excellent work.

Richard Yanchus, Pennsylvania

Sounds a lot like the Alan Light reprint series from that time period. Send a Xerox and let's get to the bottom of this mystery. Thanks for writing, Richard.

Finest & Most Key

I began reading comic books in probably 1962. Then and now I have been mostly a DC fan. Since I own Batman #1, More Fun #52 & #53, a super-high grade Spider-Man #1, etc., I can talk investments with anyone! I've dealt with Gary M. Carter, Bob Crestohl, Jerry Bails - a virtual "Hall of Fame" of Comicdom! I'm especially impressed with commentary from Dr. Keith Contarino. He accurately called very early that World's Fair '39 preceded Adventure #40 as Sandman's 1st appearance. His concerns over a lot of comics not selling is the same as mine - I look for only the finest & most key books available.

Speculators who come and go are not helping our hobby. Long-range investing is the way to go! I'm into AT&T stock, various phone companies, etc. People trying to "get rich quick" are fanciful dreamers and very unrealistic. I have a novel idea... invest for the long term and make sure you enjoy the comics as that is what a hobby is all about!

Richard M. Brown, Michigan

Absolutely Delicious!

Just wanted to drop you guys a note and say how much I enjoyed CBM #37. As a 1950s sci-fi comics fan, I was overjoyed to see so much editorial space devoted to my favorite character of all time, Adam Strange! James Van Hise did a really excellent job with his article/criticism of the Mystery In Space series. And the color graphics were absolutely delicious! The five color covers that you showed are my favorites… and are still priced in the guide at very low values. Anyway, great job!

William Blaisedell, Washington

Blazing Questions

I recently was able to purchase copies of Blazing Comics #4 and #5, both of which are very hard-to-find books. Issue #4 has some of the most wonderfully bad writing in my collection, and a classic cover of The Green Turtle. Issue #5 that I own is one of the "remaindered" comics that came out in the 1950's, meaning that extra covers, in this case from the 1945 Blazing #5, were stuck on an assortment of leftover coverless books. The most famous example of a remaindered comic, of course, is Great Comics #1 with the L. B. Cole cover.

I have two questions. First, Gerber lists Blazing #5 as having a scarcity rating of 8 (11-20 known copies), but does this apply to the remaindered comics as well as the #5 that was apparently sold in 1945 (I've never seen or heard of an actual Blazing #5 interior, but it is listed in Overstreet)? Was there an actual #5 in 1945?

Second, the Overstreet Guide lists the known interior comics as Cloak & Dagger, Will Rogers, Superman #64, Star-Spangled #130, and Kaanga. My comic however has an interior from Feature Stories Magazine (Fox). There is only one story, entitled "The Iroquois Trail", which stars J. Fenimore Cooper's character Hawkeye (or Natty Bumpo). I am assuming that this is the interior to Feature Stories Magazine #4, as #3 is listed as having Jungle Lil and Zegra stories, which this does not. However, I would like to know for certain from anyone who has an actual copy of FSM #4. In any respect, this appears to be a new title that can be added to the Overstreet list.

Andrew L. Wagner, Florida

I've personally never seen the #5 but I'm going to defer to my resident experts Michelle Nolan and Pat Calhoun to shed further light on your inquiry. Excellent questions and congrats on your new discovery!

A Major Fan

Missed issue #32 (the Murphy Anderson issue), which was one of the reasons I finally got a subscription. Enclosed please find my check for issue #32 to complete my run.

I am a major Murphy Anderson fan and keep hoping to meet him at a show (hopefully he does sketches). I know that many fans prefer the Joe Kubert Hawkman which is great stuff, but I prefer the Murphy Anderson version (as well as his beautiful Golden Age revival Showcases and B&Bs, and of course Adam Strange)! Thanks for a great magazine.

Mike Jackson, California

My thanks to everyone who wrote in this time. I hope you'll write or FAX soon! Please note that CBM reserves the right to edit letters selected for publication for length and/or content. If you'd care to write, send communications to:

EISNER'S HIGH CLASS HERO!

BY PAT S. CALHOUN

The Spirit, created in 1940 by Will Eisner, occupied a unique position in the Golden Age of comic books. Originally sold as a Sunday supplement to newspapers, the Spirit comic "booklet" appeared weekly, with an eight-page Spirit story in the lead position. Of course Eisner had also been doing an enormous amount of work in regular-sized comic books. In partnership with Jerry Iger, he ran a studio that produced much of the material for both Fiction House and Fox, including Sheena and the Blackhawk for the former, and Blue Beetle and the ill-fated Wonder-Man for the latter. After DC got Wonder-Man axed for infringing on their Superman copyright, Eisner broke with both Fox and Iger and started working for Busy Arnold's Quality Comics. Eisner soon realized that the work in the Spirit "Sections" was reaching a different audience than the newsstand comics. Comic books tended to aim for the juvenile market, while newspaper strips enjoyed a more mature readership.

Eisner said this about the strip: "I began to realize who I was writing for... I suddenly found an opportunity... to write... good material, and at the same time stay within the medium I knew and had developed skills for." This commitment to quality and to an older audience made Eisner's approach to the Spirit take a different tack than the usual "power fantasies" that were the norm in hero comic books. The Spirit often took a supporting role in his own series, allowing that week's characters center stage, so that the changes that transpired in their lives would be the main focus of the story.

When Eisner went into the Army during World War II, the Spirit strip was taken over by the cream of the Quality staff, but- solid as their work was- it fell short of what Will himself had done before. However, after the War, Eisner came back to the strip with renewed vigor, and the Spirit soared to new heights. Always one of the most cinematic artists, Eisner's postwar work made sure that the awesome angle shots, panel layouts, and other special design effects were all thoroughly integrated into the storytelling structure.

The first story in *Spirit* #18 (November 1949) reprints the January 13, 1946 episode that reprises the Spirit's origin, as told by Police Commissioner Dolan. The young "criminologist" Denny Colt- almost an adopted son to Dolan- is out investigating Dr. Cobra, a notorious European poisoner at large in Central City. While in the lab of the lawless scientist, Colt gets "sapped" and ends up unconscious, face-down in a puddle of potion. The chemicals act to suspend animation, and when found, Colt is pronounced dead and is later buried in Wildwood Cemetery.

But as the formula's effects wear off, Colt awakens and escapes and comes to realize that his "legally dead" status may help in his crime-fighting. Adding a blue mask to his blue suit he becomes the Spirit; and continues to battle injustice- unencumbered by rules and regulations. With the help of Dolan and Ebony White, the youngest cabbie in Central City, they finally apprehend Dr. Cobra. Colt reveals his identity to the Commissioner and vows to keep working with Dolan, using his vigilante role to cut through the "red tape and politics" that often hamper the police.

The second yarn, "The Bucket O' Blood", is somewhat supernatural, about a statue that protects its owner, and while amusing enough, it's familiar and forgettable. Producing an eight-page story every week meant sometimes bowing to the pressure of deadlines. The third Spirit tale, "Satin Returns", gets back in the groove with an Eisner specialty, the "sexy spy". The seductive Satin returns to Central City, where her daughter has been seized by kidnappers. She encounters her old flame, the Spirit, and together they rescue the child- who's heiress to a fortune in Europe. The scene where Satin blows away the kidnappers is more affecting than the usual four-color fatalities. And, of course, Ellen Dolan, the Commissioner's daughter and the Spirit's more-or-less official fiancee, is around to protect her beau from possible poachers.

Spirit #20 (April 1950) reprints three more 1946 strips. The luxurious femme fatale on the cover is a "realistic" rendering of a character who's more of a cartoon on the inside. Orcha Chornya of the Siberian Secret Service vamps her way through an eight-page spoof- of the whimsical sort sometimes indulged in by Eisner. The other two Spirit narratives are somewhat more "serious", with "The Vortex" providing strong evidence that "the weed of crime bears bitter fruit". Actor Adam, impressed at how his Spirit disguise fooled Commissioner Dolan, decides to continue the masquerade, black-

Spirit #20 (Apr 1950) This issue features the blue-clad crimefighter "mixing it up" with a curvaceous agent of the Siberian Secret Service and also offers a tale of a man caught in the swirling river of crime and sucked into "The Vortex".

mailing underworld denizens. As "the Spirit", he starts up a protection racket. But when a couple of toughs call his bluff, the results are graphic and brutal.

"Magnifying Glasses", the third Spirit tale in the issue (rounded out with some funny fillers), isn't deep, but it evolved from a remarkably clever conceit. Here a street vendor, selling wind-up Spirit dolls and trick spectacles on a corner that soon becomes a crime scene, has his toys- by sheer happenstance- become traps that thwart the criminal wrongdoings and save the Spirit's life. This plot formula of "coincidental intervention" is one Eisner used frequently and with great facility.

Eisner unleashes another of his "witch" women in *Spirit* #21's (June 1950) reprints and on another extremely enticing cover P'gell's ability to manipulate men with her charms is demonstrated again and again in a story that's an eight-page library of alluring poses and not all that much else, but it's done with a great deal of panache. "The Grumly Murder" begins with a splash of Commissioner Dolan stretching a rubber band out until it breaks, and the story consists of three portraits of people pushed beyond the limit. First Dolan has a mini nervous breakdown from overwork… then a suspected murderer kills himself unable to face the ordeal of a trial and prison… then the Spirit hounds the real murderer until... It all comes together rather well, but has so much going on that it suffers a little from being squeezed down to eight pages.

The last yarn provides comic relief, with Commissioner Dolan's man-hungry sister Mathilda on the loose. But her fiancee is a crook who hopes that marriage into the Dolan clan will get the local law to cut him some slack. Oh, and Mathilda almost sells the Spirit on the idea of proposing to Ellen. It's lightweight fun, but, as always, the story is packaged with exemplary skill.

The 13-year newspaper supplement run of the Spirit is a body of work that inspired a two-issue Harvey revival in 1966, and a reprint series from Kitchen Sink that began in 1973. Given the literate nature of the scripts and the breadth of technique in the art, one hopes that the Spirit stories will remain available for readers in search of a high-class hero. ■

Spirit #18 (Nov 1949) Eisner's post-War comeback began with a "who he is and how he came to be" recap of the Spirit's origin, and this issue also includes "The Return of Satin", a beautiful British spy who's quick on the trigger.

Spirit #21 (Jun 1950) P'Gell of Paris strikes a sultry but dangerous pose on this classic Eisner cover. Her story, she announces on the inside splash panel, "is not for little boys".

You'll Like Sugar and Spike

DC's most underrated title!

By Michelle Nolan

WHAT ARE THE MOST DIFFICULT OF DC'S SILVER AGE titles to collect as a run? What Silver Age DC comics are the toughest to find in high grade? In what DC series did a Golden Age character first reappear? And what just might be the funniest, most touching comic book series of all time?

The answer to all of these questions is Sheldon Mayer's *Sugar & Spike*, a work of nothing less than inspired genius. Most collectors are aware of the original series, which ran 98 issues from 1956-71, but not many know much about them.

Like Uncle Scrooge and Little Lulu, *Sugar & Spike* can be thoroughly enjoyed on one level by those of five years of age and on another level by those of fifty years of age. Whether you're a grandchild, grandparent, or anything in between, *Sugar & Spike* might just be the most amusing comic book of all time. I find it impossible to sit down with any issue from the first half of the run and not burst into laughter several times, no matter how often I might have read it.

Any Hall-Of Fame for cartoonists, of course, would have the late Sheldon Mayer enshrined in the main wing. Not only was he one of the leading editors of the Golden Age (beginning when he wasn't even out of his teens), but he spent more than 20 years as one of the finest humorists in comics. Much has been written about how Mayer guided the early All-American line of comics for M.C. Gaines, playing a key role in the development of never-to-be forgotten characters such as the original Green Lantern, Flash, and Wonder Woman. Mayer, who passed away late in 1991 at the age of 74, has seldom been underrated for his part in comic book history. But Sugar & Spike might be the most underrated of his creations.

In 1948, when Mayer was 31 and some three years after Gaines' All American line officially merged with its distributor, National Periodical Publications (DC), Mayer gave up editing to devote his full attention to cartooning, his first love. Scribbly, his wacky semi-autobiographical strip, first appeared in Dell's early *Popular Comics* and *The Funnies*, then moved with Mayer to the Gaines fold in 1939. Scribbly gained his own comic in 1948. But Scribbly, the frenetic boy cartoonist whose strips enlivened the first 59 issues of *All-American Comics* through 1944, lasted only 15 issues in his own title. *Scribbly*, however, set the stage for what was to become Mayer's greatest success (and perhaps his greatest joy) – *Sugar & Spike*.

Before creating Sugar & Spike, Mayer focused his cartooning genius on funny animal strips such as Three Mouseketeers, Doodles Duck, Dizzy Dog and Bo Bunny. Mayer also created the concept for the long-running teen title *Leave It to Binky*. Mayer's funny animal work alone appeared in at least 10 DC titles covering well over 200 issues in the 1940's and 50's. Mayer's anthropomorphic antics are surely some of

the best examples of that genre, but it was (pardon the pun) only "kid's stuff" compared with what was to come in *Sugar & Spike*.

Late in 1955, when Mayer began to sketch out his concepts for *Sugar & Spike* #1 (April/May 1956), several of DC's funny animal comics either had recently been discontinued or were on their last legs. Mayer started a moderately successful *Three Mouseketeers* series, which ran from 1956-60 (#1-26), but otherwise he was now in a position to devote most of his cartooning efforts to *Sugar & Spike*. This was a truly original concept – that of two neighbor toddlers, old enough to walk but not to talk except to each other. The likes of Sugar Plumm and Spike Wilson had never been seen in the comics, at least to the best of my knowledge. Until *Sugar & Spike* hit the scene, most of the kids in comics were at least in the kindergarten-and-up age group.

Sugar & Spike #25 (Nov 1959) – Spike has to think quickly on the first Halloween cover of the series as the battle of the sexes continues!

In the wake of the creation of the Comics Code Authority (the first Code-approved comics hit the stands a little more than a year before *Sugar & Spike* #1) publishers were trying anything they thought might still sell. Sugar & Spike surely was among the most original of the new concepts. It also was among the most successful of DC's Silver Age creations.

In the immediate post-Code era of 1955-57, DC tried 12 new titles and bought four others from Quality when that company folded at the end of 1956 (*Blackhawk*, *G.I. Combat*, *Heart Throbs* and *Robin Hood Tales*). Eight of DC's 16 new comics became reasonably successful long-running anthologies – *My Greatest Adventure*, *Tales Of The Unexpected*, *House Of Secrets*, *Brave & The Bold*, *Showcase*, *G.I. Combat*, *Falling In Love*, and *Heart Throbs*. Three titles based on TV fads fizzled after eight issues–*Frontier Fighters*, *Legends of Daniel Boone*, and *Robin Hood Tales*. One title failed after only four issues – the child-oriented *It's Game Time*. Two titles had relatively brief runs after their TV shows ended: *Jackie Gleason* (12 issues) and *Sgt. Bilko* (18 issues). *The Three Mouseketeers* struggled on for its 26 issues. *Blackhawk*, of course, had built up considerable momentum from the Golden Age, and it lasted 136 issues in its original DC run from 1957 through 1968.

Then there was *Sugar & Spike*. Other than *Blackhawk*, *Sugar & Spike* was the only new 1955-57 non-anthology title that became a success for DC (*Jimmy Olsen* began in 1954). It's hard to call *Sugar & Spike* an unqualified success in terms of circulation–its high water mark listed in statements of ownership was only the 209,000 average listed in #33 (March, 1961)–the first year that circulation figures were required to be listed for comics. That would be booming sales today, but by 1961 standards those were not exciting figures. Still, the title lasted 10 more years. How much Mayer's company-wide influence had to do with *Sugar & Spike*'s survival is problematical, but the point is that it did survive for 15 years. In fact, the title went from bi-monthly to eight times per year with #9 (August 1957) but it returned to bi-monthly status for good with #21 (February/March 1959).

Today, *Sugar & Spike* is an extremely difficult run to collect, especially in high grade, because the vast majority of its original readers were young children. Paper doll pages, game pages, and so forth led to much more frequent mutilation than most comics experienced. It took me more than 12 years to complete the 98-issue run, even searching for low-grade copies. I didn't finish the quest until Harley Yee was kind enough to give me a break on a copy of #37 at WonderCon in April. I know ye editor has a complete set, but I wonder how many other complete sets are in existence? As I recall, Harley said he'd been sold a complete set, but of course it's now scattered among several collectors. I'd venture to say fewer than a dozen collectors in the nation have all 98 issues of *Sugar & Spike*. And I'll bet not one collector in the country has all 98 issues in at least "fine" or better. Can anyone prove me wrong?

By this time, you're probably wondering if I'll ever get around to the reference I made to the first reappearance

SUGAR & SPIKE

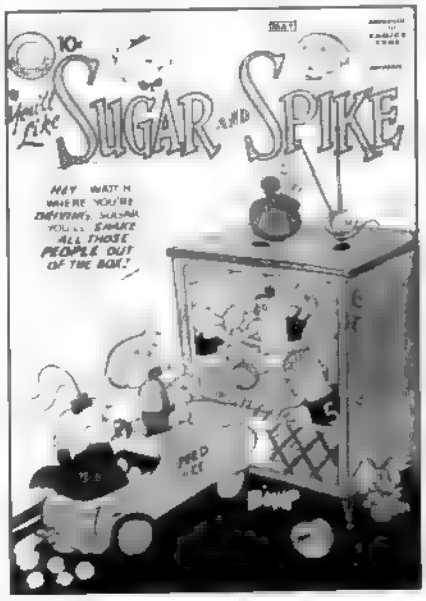
COVER THEME ISSUES

Halloween Covers:
#25 (11/59), #31 (11/60), #37 (11/61), #43 (11/62), #49 (11/63), #55 (11/64), #61 (11/65), #67 (11/66), #98 (11/71, reprints #55)

Christmas Covers:
#26 (1/60), #32 (1/61), #38 (1/62), #44 (1/63), #50 (1/64), #56 (1/65), #62 (1/66), #68 (1/67)

Valentine's Day Cvrs:
#27 (3/60), #33 (3/61), #39 (3/62), #45 (3/63), #51 (3/64), #57 (3/65), #63 (3/66)

Beach Covers:
#3 (9/56), #9 (8/57), #18 (9/58), #24 (9/59), #30 (9/60), #35 (7/61), #36 (9/61), #41 (7/62), #42 (9/62), #47 (7/63), #54 (9/64), #65 (7/66), #66 (9/66), #72 (9/67), #91 (9/70), #92 (11/70), #97 (9/71)



of a Golden Age character in a Silver Age title. We... it was Scribbly!

The adult version of Scribbly appears in a cameo role with Scribbly Jr. for the first and only time in a beach story in #30 (September 1960). At the end of this charming tale Maver draws a tiny picture of the teen-age Scribbly and dedicates it to a reader who wondered whatever happened to his earlier creation. I always thought it was a shame that Scribbly didn't come back. To the best of my knowledge, however, this is only the second story reference in all of DC Comics to the fact that an earlier age of comics existed (the first such reference occurred in the origin story of the Silver Age Flash in *Showcase* #4, when the existence of the Golden Age *Flash Comics* is acknowledged). Of course, by the end of the decade the company was to become filled with such references and revived characters, but Maver was there first.

Sugar & Spike was pure Americana, but it was so much more than that. It was an entirely new way of looking at the world in a comic strip. Much of the time, especially in the early strips, parents and other adults were shown as a pair of legs. Maver truly portrayed the world as it might be experienced through a toddler's eyes and ears. He wrote about such things as the yak-yak box (the telephone), the put-put (police officer Uncle Charley's motorcycle), the shiny round rollers (marbles), the funny runners (roller skates), the fix-it machine (Spike's father), the magic window (a mirror), the magic string (a lamp cord), and so many other commonplace items that Maver turned into touching story-telling at the most basic of levels.

Maver also did all the covers, many of them among the cutest and most genuinely amusing in comic book history. For the first 11 years of the series, he usually produced covers for Halloween, Christmas, and Valentine's Day. Maver also produced more than a dozen beach covers, indicative of the role relief from the heat played in the psyche of New Yorkers of the day. People who grew up on the West Coast like I did, had no idea as children of the importance of relief from the muggy conditions in much of the rest of the nation, but all you have to do is read *Sugar & Spike* and you can tell it was produced on the East Coast.

Maver's art and story-telling was never falsely sentimental ...and his appeal was to one's sense of humor, not to one's manipulated emotions.

Sugar & Spike was actually two comics. Roughly the first two-thirds of the series (63 issues) were devoted primarily to gentle fables of misadventure and discovery by the babies. These are the issues I love best. In the 1992 *Sugar & Spike* #99 was published as part of the DC Silver Age Classics series and contained two previously unpublished stories. Famed fan and *CBG* editor Maggie Thompson described the challenges the toddlers faced in those wonderful early stories: exploring the world, battling communications barriers, making logical deductions, and solving problem after problem. That's a perfect description, one I certainly won't try to improve upon. Incidentally, that issue contains wonderful tributes of Maver by Maggie Thompson, Anthony Tolan (who colored the two stories), Dick Giordano, and others. If you're interested in Maver, that's the source of the best information, along with Ron Goulart's books. More typical of the way *Sugar & Spike* remains in the DC background is the brief treatment given by Les Daniels in his generally excellent coffee-table book, *DC Comics*.

Maver would occasionally come up with an off-the-wall concept, such as 125-year-old Great-Great-Great-Grandpa Plumm, (who debuted in #24, September 1959). He was the first surreal character in the strip. The Space Sprout, a truly charming tiny little girl, appeared in #40 (May 1962) and #43 (November 1962). Basically, however, the stories kept the slapstick and surreal elements to a relative minimum.

With issue #64 (May 1966) however, came the first book-length story, "Baby Heroes", and the strip evolved into utterly surreal slapstick much in the vein of Ma Hunkle as the Red Tornado during Scribbly's early 1940's run in *All American*. In one novel, in which Sugar & Spike's long-running 4-year-old pest of a friend Little Arthur, becomes "Tornado Tot" in #69 (March 1967), the story is almost a direct take-off on Maver's satires on super heroes of more than two decades earlier. The series of novels, during which the child genius Bernie the Brain was introduced in #72 (September 1967), continued through #87 (January 1970). There was one more novel #90 (featuring Bernie the Brain, who had seemed to threaten to take over the book) but otherwise the last few issues returned to the short story format.

Two new characters were introduced late in the series: Zelda the Walking Riot (a robot baby) in #91 and

ABOVE: **#45 (Mar 1963) – Sheldon Mayer did seven classic Valentine's Day covers.**

FACING PAGE: **#7 (May 1957) – This television cover is typical of Sheldon Mayer's genius for seeing the world the way a toddler might view it. It's becoming popular to collect covers of the 1940's through the 1960's with television used as part of the theme.**

Landmarks in the Sugar & Spike series

#1 (5/56)	Origin of Sugar & Spike, introduction of Sugar's Uncle Charley, the kind-hearted motorcycle cop
#2 (7/56)	First appearance of "Pint Size Pinups" paper doll series
#3 (9/56)	Intro of Spike's Aunt Minerva, first letters page in a DC Silver Age Comic
#5 (1/57)	Sugar & Spike's parents' faces are shown for the first time
#6 (3/57)	Introduction of Spike's grandmother
#7 (5/57)	Sheldon Mayer explains in letters column how he created Sugar & Spike
#8 (7/57)	Introduction of Sugar's grandfather.
#9 (8/57)	Series goes to eight times per year.
#16 (6/58)	Origin retold in new story; only appearance "Scribbly's Cartoon Corner", 1-page filler (left over from Golden Age?)
#17 (8/58)	Introduction of Little Arthur, 4-year-old pest who becomes a mainstay.
#21 (3/59)	Series returns for good to bi-monthly status.
#22 (5/59)	Introduction of Billy the Borrower.
#24 (9/59)	Introduction of Sugar's Great-Great-Great-Grandpa Plumm (125 years old)–first surreal character in the series
#27 (3/60)	Introduction of "The Strange Stranger" (is it a boy or girl?)
#29 (7/60)	First surreal slapstick story, "Adventure with a Flying Saucer"
#30 (9/60)	Scribbly makes his only reappearance since the Golden Age
#34 (5/61)	Only baseball cover in the series.
#39 (3/62)	Introduction of Muscles, the circus strong baby.
#40 (5/62)	First two-part story introduces alien baby girl "Space Sprout".
#43 (11/62)	Space Sprout makes her only reappearance in original series.
#44 (1/63)	First four-part story (with Santa Claus and Little Arthur)
#47 (7/63)	Introduction of "The Genius", a super-intelligent baby
#50 (1/64)	Spike gets a puppy who looks like Mayer's Dizzy Dog strip
#60 (9/65)	Introduction of Perry the Persuader
#63 (3/66)	Introduction of Wally the Worrier
#64 (5/66)	First book-length novel "Baby Heroes"
#69 (3/67)	Little Arthur in only appearance as "Tornado Tot"
#72 (9/67)	Introduction of Bernie the Brain
#75 (3/68)	Doodles Duck reappears in story (reprint?) about comics and books
#85 (10/69)	Giant reprint 25-cent issue
#91 (9/70)	Introduction of Zelda the Walking Riot (baby robot)
#94 (3/71)	Introduction of Raymond Smith, first black child in strip

Raymond Smith (the first black toddler in the series) in #94. But by this time Mayer was having severe problems with his eyesight and the series wasn't selling well even by its historically low standards. In issue #95 (May 1971), the average circulation is listed at 135,093. In the issue nearest to publication date, only 150 readers subscribed… dramatically down from the 1,515 subscribers listed only four years earlier in #69, when the average circulation was 189,000.

Issue #98 (November 1971) reprints the Halloween-cover from #55 (November 1965). It was clearly the end for Sugar & Spike, at least until about a decade later, when Mayer revived the strip for foreign markets… a few years after surgery restored much of his vision. I don't know much about that end of it, although some of that work appears in the *Best Of DC Blue-Ribbon Digest* reprints in the first half of the 1980s (#28, 29, 41, 47, 58, 65, & 68).

Also of note is the fact that *Sugar & Spike* was the first Silver Age DC comic with a letters column, beginning with #3 (September 1956). (The first DC letters page was in the 1940's *Real Fact Comics*.) It was also the only DC comic with paper dolls, which began a continuous run with issue #2. In that letters' column, always warm and delightful, Mayer–referred in 1960 to a syndicated daily newspaper *Sugar & Spike* strip, but I've never seen any examples of it, if it ever got off the ground. Mayer would occasionally reveal bits of comic history, such as how his own children Merrily and Lanney, born close together during World War II, inspired the characters of Sugar & Spike… and some early references to comic collecting also were included.

In issue #40 (May 1962), there is a letters' page reference to Mayer being surprised that early issues of Scribbly were selling for $14 each. I seriously doubt that was the case, since very few old comics were selling for that much in those days, when you could find them. It's possible of course, that some of the earliest issues of *All American Comics* with Scribbly, both pre-and post-Green Lantern, were being offered in the $14 range. It's possible these might have been the source of that reference. In #97, there is a letter from well-known New York fan David Kaler, saying only #15 has eluded him while collecting the entire series. Interestingly, that also was (by far) the toughest issue of the first 25 issues (the 1950s issues) for me to find.

"You'll Like Sugar & Spike" was the logo for several of the early issues, and nothing could be truer. From both the collector's and reader's point of view … *Sugar & Spike* is not just kid's stuff! ■

Michelle Nolan is a nationally recognized collector and researcher of comic books from the '40s through the '60s. She has one of the most extensive collections of 1950's comic books in the United States. In real life Michelle works as a freelance journalist.

HERE'S WHAT I THINK!

ROBERT BEERBOHM

Conan #3; the Mafia Connection!

Recently bought CBM #35 at Anarchy Comics in Omaha. I let my sub .apse so as to encourage this local comic book store to give CBM a try by making sure he had a guaranteed sale. The owner ordered me one (as well as a couple extra for his rack, which he promptly sold out on) which I just finished reading. Many of your present subscribers might consider getting their local comics shop to stock CBM on a regular basis as one way to expand your circulation by placing a "sample" on the new comic rack paid for with the profit of the issue you order from them. Besides, the sellers of new comics need all the help they can get in order to help them try and stay in business as this latest recovery still works its way through.

Some thoughts on the ish . . re a couple things that I am presently feeling compelled to present my views out into the public arena.

Rarity Of Spider-Man #1

Apparently John Mlachnik honestly believes there are only 1,700 copies of Spiderman #1 known to exist. I'm wondering what he bases this assumption on. I was talking with an LA mail order customer of mine last night and voiced what I read in CBM #35's "Here's What I Think" and he said one could probably find 1,700 copies in the Los Angeles area alone. I personally estimate there are probably between 20,000 and 30,000 copies of Spidey #1 in this country in various grades. One always sees copies for sale at every comics convention all over the country. Most copies live in private long term collections and never get offered for sale.

In the last 30 years, I personally have sold over 1,000 copies of Spiderman #1. I seriously doubt that I have handled over half of the copies still in existence. At the San Diego or Chicago Comicons, for example, one can easily see many hundreds of copies for sale if one takes an informal poll by sight-seeing all the booths. It is not a rare book by any stretch of the imagination. The price tag this and other Marvels have recently been reaching boggles the mind to many a collector out here. Many of us "serious" co.lectors can only ascribe the price quotes presently being asked on this comic book to greed, pure and simple.

Rarity Of Conan #3

In the excellent Roy Thomas interview, a question was posed regarding the supposed scarcity of Conan #3. "About the ever-present rumors about Conan #3, did it really have low

production?" Here is a tid-bit from my forthcoming history of the comics business, Comic Book Store Wars, upon which I work every day and hope to finish soon.

Starting in the mid 1960s, a few members of the Mafia began laundering money from of their activities by buying up huge quantities of then-brand new comic books. It is part of the public record that the Mafia had moved into magazine distribution as one way to legitimize what they had been up to earlier in this century.

They even purchased quantities of many of the better photo offset comics fanzines that came out. This is common knowledge among many old-time comic sellers. In other words, the Mafia funded a lot of the growth comics fandom started experiencing in the late 1960s by helping to keep a lot of these struggling fan publishers afloat.

Joe Brancatelli was going to do an expose on this in Inside Comics, however, the magazine was discontinued with #4 back in 1974 or so, and the article never saw print. I have talked recently several times with this editor of the first genuine comics journalism magazine ever to see print and one of the things we talked about was the Mafioso we will only call "Tony."

Allow me a side-step here for a second. When Conan #1 first came out on the newsstands, I personally speculated on 600 copies at 20¢ a book from a newsstand here in Fremont. All of $120. My high school buddy Steve Johnson and myself took them to that summer's Phil Seuling New York Comic Art Convention and wholesaled them all at $1 each: a 500% mark-up. Gas was a quarter a gallon and Conan #1 paid for our entire trip to NYC that year. Many people "speced" on the title. Barry Smith and Berni Wrightson (Swamp Thing) were the two "hottest" artists to collect at the time.

(I also personally bought 100 copies each of Daredevil #1 and Hawkman #1 back in 1964 as well as speculating on all kinds of other comics in the 60s such as having purchased 200 each of Silver Surfer #1, SHIELD #1, Sub-mariner #1, Ironman #1, etc. in 1968 but that is another story altogether. Comics speculation began a lot longer ago and in more depth than many present-day "experts" have any knowledge of. How could they? Many of today's "experts" weren't around back then. One could call that an accident of birth.)

In late 1972, Bud Plant, John Barrett, and myself started the first comics retail chain store organization in the country called Comics and Comix. We first tapped into the Mafia Comics (Continued on page 78)

by Stephen Barrington

Which actor got to hand Dorothy a lollipop in MGM's "Wizard of Oz", blast George (Superman) Reeves with a ray gun, congregate with the original cast of the starship Enterprise, portrayed the namesake of the Buster Brown comic books from the local shoe store, and played "The World's Smallest Chef" for a major hot dog maker. If you're a movie or TV buff, or a fan of the 1950's comic books and popular collectibles, you might recognize his face. Never reaching the height of 4' 5", this mysterious Hollywood star is actor and internationally recognized personality, Jerry Maren!

Now retired at the age of 75, Jerry could possibly be the most famous little person you've ever known! Jerry started his career in 1938, at the age of 18, with the filming of the movie classic, "The Wizard of Oz" released in 1939. "I played the middle guy in the lollipop league... we sang the song for Judy Garland to welcome her to Munchkinland," recalls the veteran actor who stands 4' 4 ½". This classic movie launched his career

"I was in high school at the time and did a dancing act with my three dancing teachers. We did an act called "Three Steps and One Hop" during the summer vacation. This fella saw me in this place in Hartford, Connecticut and said 'Say, I've seen your act and we're going to need about six little guys that can really sing and dance. If you're interested, leave me your phone number and we'll get in touch with you.' Believe it or not, three months later, I got a telegram from Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer to appear in the "Wizard of Oz" all expenses paid!"

Jerry was residing in Boston, Massachusetts, at the time. Jerry, who was born and raised in Boston, is the youngest of 12 children, while his wife Elizabeth Barrington, a native of Mobile, Alabama, is the oldest of 12 children. Elizabeth is 4' 4" tall.

Jerry's parents came from Naples, Italy, to Boston, on their honeymoon where they settled.

Following the long and difficult shooting of the "Wizard of Oz" which took seven weeks, Jerry went on to feature in the Our Gang Comedy series. The comedy short was entitled "Tiny Troubles" and was also released in 1939. In that comedy classic Jerry played a gangster named "Light Fingers" Lester who was disguised as a baby. "I was small (he hadn't reached four feet yet) and I had the baby face."

His next feature film was "At the Circus" (1939) with the Marx Brothers. Like the "Wizard of Oz" and the Our Gang Comedy, it was also an MGM production. "I was Professor Atom," Jerry recalled. "That was way before the Atom Bomb. I played a midget in the circus and was a murder suspect." The set (a train car) was designed for a midget. Jerry was not the killer, however.

Jerry got another "small part" when he was cast as a mischievous gremlin in the film "Johnny Doesn't Live Here Anymore" (1944). The movie starred Simone Simone and Robert Mitchum. "They blamed me for everything that went wrong." He was particularly adept at making Simone Simone late for her factory job by tinkering with her alarm clock. "Everything was big," Jerry said about the props used for his scenes. "The ink well in the movie was about five times my size." Later on Jerry did "The Great John L." (1945) the film about the fighter, John L. Sullivan. Jerry played the owner of a small saloon. About this time he also did stunt work in the movie "Crime doesn't Pay."

During a brief stint in the '40s, Jerry portrayed one of his strangest roles... he was made up to play the "real life" version of Edgar Bergen's dummy, Charlie McCarthy! He also portrayed McCarthy's other dummy, Mortimer Snerd.

Superman and the Mole-Men

In 1951 Jerry faced off against Superman in "Superman And The Mole-Men," the pilot for the then upcoming Superman television show. "We didn't socialize with the star (George Reeves), the producer didn't like it. He was a fine, nice quiet man," Jerry recalled.

In that landmark episode, two subterranean-dwelling mole-men ascended to the surface of the earth after an oil company had invaded their space with "the world's deepest well." "They were blaming us (the mole-men) for everything... and the townspeople came looking for us. After one of our own was shot (on a prior excursion), we came out of the well... and I had something that was suppose to be my ray gun. It looked like an old vacuum cleaner... well, because that's what I think it was!"

Jerry continues "The thing that struck me most (about the action at the well sight) was that Superman came after us, I shot my ray gun at him, and the blast was dubbed in later. Since he was Superman, it, of course was supposed to just bounce off of him. He was after us; but our characters didn't know who the hell he was. We were supposed to be from another world beneath the Earth so we (our characters) weren't supposed to know that the ray couldn't hurt Superman. The costumes we wore in the Superman movie had heavy wigs to cover our heads and the suits looked like 'little beans' from the neck down. Felix Silla, who played Buck Rogers on TV and "It" on the Addams Family TV show portrayed the injured mole man."

This now-famous and collectible pilot was later

JERRY THE MUNCHKIN (center) hands Dorothy (Judy Garland) a lollipop to welcome her to Munchkinland.

A RECENT PHOTO of Jerry Maren.

REEVES AND CO. (facing page, left to right) Tony Boris (ex Philip Morris of Radio), George Reeves (Superman), Billy Curtis, John Winters, Jerry Maren with Ray Gun.

cut into two 30-minute episodes entitled, "The Unknown People."

Comic Books and Wienermobiles!

It was comic books and shoes next for Jerry. "In the early '50s, I was with Oscar Mayer Meat Packing Company when Buster Brown Shoes approached me about being their mascot." Jerry was about to be two living mascots at the same time!

JERRY AS BUSTER BROWN and his dog Tige (1950s).

PROFESSOR ATOM Jerry, far left, as the Prof. in At The Circus with the Marx Brothers (1939 Chico center, Groucho right).

There are thousands of Buster Brown comic books out there featuring his photograph, including the Buster Brown companion title My Dog Tige. "That's my dog Tige he lives in a shoe, I'm Buster Brown, look for me there too," Jerry fondly recalls the slogan.

While he did very few personal appearances as Buster Brown, it was a different story as Oscar Mayer's Little Oscar. "The World's Smallest Chef."

"The work for Oscar Mayer was all personal appearances as Little Oscar in the Weinermobile. It was a lot of fun, but it was a lot of work too When I first started, it was two or three stores a day. Then I started appearing at children's kiddie shows at the beginning of the week plugging my appearances coming up for Friday and Saturday

"The kids thought I was cute and they knew they were going to get a free wienie whistle and maybe a picture of Little Oscar. They'd go in the store and get free samples of wieners"

Jerry pointed out one drawback though "It seems like all of the kids that were sick were the ones that loved me the most. These were the ones that wanted to hug me. I was getting sick every damn week! The kids were right on top of you, 'Hi ya, Oscar!' Then they'd slobber all over me. They meant right but it was funny at the time. I had kids coming at me from all directions... I did actually enjoy them, though."

Hartman, Rainbows, and Apes

Jerry said that one of his most satisfying roles came in the '70s on the television program, "Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman."

"We were in about four episodes in a row portraying a mini-SWAT team to save people. If someone couldn't get in a building, they'd call us. My name was Dash, and I was the head of the team. I had lots of dialogue and I never thought that I could do it, but I did. We were something like the seven dwarfs with our tools and everything."

If "Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman" is pleasantly remembered by Jerry, then the 1981 movie "Under the Rainbow" is one to forget. This movie (given a "bomb" rating by Leonard Maltin) was supposed to make fun of the making of the Wizard of Oz. Even though it was a dream sequence, he felt that the portrayal of the little people was unfair.

"It was all lies," Jerry said testily. "It never happened," Jerry remarked about the supposed drunken and riotous behavior of the little people during the movie's filming in the late '30s. One bright spot, though, was the money. "Elizabeth and I made plenty of money so, we didn't do that bad financially.

In "Battle For The Planet Of The Apes" (1973), Jerry and Elizabeth played simian children. They had no heavy make-up but used masks. "As long as we had the masks it was fun," Jerry said. "We just had to shove it over our faces and we were ready to go. When we had lunch we just took them off. The other actors had to eat their dinner through straws. It was awful."

Star Trek

In the 1967 Star Trek episode, "Journey to Babel," it was just another job for him. Jerry was not overly familiar with the show. "I had heard of Star Trek; I knew it was a space show and they wanted me and my partner Billy Curtis to appear in one of the episodes. The part wasn't much; it was a little thing," he said,

intending no pun. "It was a big inter-galactic convention, and we were guests from one of the planets.

This particular episode features the first appearance of Spock's parents, Sarek and Amanda. The Enterprise is en route to an important Federation conference on a planet code-named Babel. Traveling aboard are delegates from a multitude of planets.

Years ago, when Star Trek episodes were first being released two-at-a-time on videocassettes, Jerry's scene at the buffet table with Curtis was featured on the picture sleeve.

"The sets were terrific. They were very imaginative and well done," Jerry remembered about his first impressions of the sound stage. The scene, since it involved a great number of actors, was shot over a two-day period. "It was a big scene; a lot of people were in it."

The food on the table was actually real with Jerry admonishing his partner, Billy, not to taste it. "Billy kept eating it. I said 'Don't eat it!' because it's got to match the next scene. If you take something from the plate it would look different. Billy was nibbling at the food but he was a rabble-rouser anyway," Jerry said affectionately. Curtis, who with Jerry, traveled the United States, on a USO tour visiting hospital units during World War II, passed away several years ago.

The director gave them specific instructions for their scene. According to Jerry, "The director, Joseph Pevney, said 'You're from another planet, so this food is a little different than what you have on your own planet. Be suspicious of what you eat or look at; think, 'what's that?'" The scene was a brief one on the television screen, lasting about 30 seconds. "We were dressed up like Turks actually," remembered Jerry. Jerry and Billy were made up in heavy gold makeup. "It wasn't very difficult to put on because there were no whiskers or beards to worry about. It took about a half hour to put on. The pay was $110 per day. "We could have insisted on more money but it was a quickie and we were both working on other jobs so we took it because the most it would be was two days."

After that episode, Jerry developed a liking for the original Star Trek show. "I think the show is still popular because it is fascinating and it is different. You never knew what was going to happen and the suspense was wonderful. The people loved the different characters."

"Never in a million years," was Jerry's response when asked if he thought Star Trek would achieve the fame that it has. "It was the same thing with The

OSCAR MAYER WITH JERRY CURTIS
Jerry shaking hands with store owner (1950s).

JERRY HELD BY HUMPHREY BOGART
and pal Billy Curtis held by Alan Ladd during the 1945 Friars Frolic at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles.

Wizard of Oz. It was a typical MGM musical and that was a typical Star Trek episode. But since then they've become classics ... classics of motion pictures and classics of television."

Little German General

Since his retirement, Jerry has spent the last few years touring the country with his wife commemorating The Wizard of Oz at conventions. His wife Elizabeth, who does mainly stunts, has worked on a number of Disney films including The Apple Dumpling Gang, No Deposit, No Return and Freaky Friday. Other movies include, The Incredible Shrinking Woman, The Great Outdoors and the Golden Child, with Eddie Murphy.

Jerry worked for McDonalds for 12 years, playing Mayor McCheese, Big Mac, and Hamburglar. Other movies Jerry appeared in were Tron, Space Balls, Something Wicked This Way Comes, House (with his wife), (in which he starred) Little Cigars, It Came Upon a Midnight Clear, Where the Buffalo Roam (with Bill Murray), the Great Outdoors, and The Bad News Bears Go to Japan

Some of his television credits include: original Twilight Zone, The Beverly Hillbillies, Bewitched, Sonny and Cher, The Odd Couple, The Andy Williams Show, The Gong Show, Wizards and Warriors, Logan's Run and the Lucy Show (Lucy Meets Ma Barker). On the Andy Williams Show, Jerry played the Little German General for two years; while on the Gong Show he and his wife frequently did gag acts for the audience. Jerry also was the chief confetti thrower at the end of each show.

Jerry also starred on the syndicated version of Truth or Consequences several years ago, playing the character "Truth" while another little person played "Consequences." On the late network program No Soap Radio, Jerry played a bell captain. He also appeared on CBS network news, Geraldo Rivera, Marsha Warfield, "A Current Affair" and "To Tell the Truth"

Jerry and Elizabeth, happily married for over 20 years, live in the Hollywood Hills section of Los Angeles in their custom built house. ■

Stephen Barrington is the author of numerous newspaper and magazine articles... and has the distinction of being Jerry Maren's brother-in-law.

JERRY AS A CHILD APE in Battle For The Planet of the Apes (1973).

LITTLE GERMAN GENERAL Jerry as the General on the Andy Williams Show in 1960.

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SOLAR LEGION

KIRBY'S FIRST INTERGALACTIC HEROES!

By Todd Severin

The day has come when science has penetrated the mysteries of the universe and no longer is man confined to earth, for space has yielded boundaries; planets are united as one. In the interest of the denizens of the cosmos, Adam Starr has organized the Solar Legion to create peace and good will among men. –*Crash Comics* #4

Soaring space heroes, interstellar battles and evil tyrants… these were the elements of Jack Kirby's Fourth World series of the 1970s, a journey of cosmic adventure! This series, however, wasn't Kirby's first foray into the realm of intergalactic space opera. As far back as 1939, Kirby looked towards the stars for inspiration when the King first unveiled the tale of Adam Starr and the Solar Legion.

By 1939, Kirby had already established himself as a skilled artist with his work at Lincoln Features, a small syndicate house which supplied weekly comic strips to newspapers. Kirby, working under the various pen names of Jack Curtiss, Bob Brown, Ted Grey and Richard Lee created and drew several weekly adventure strips like Abdul Jones, Cyclone Burke and Socko the Sea Dog. This body of work brought enough notice to the young artist that he was offered an assignment from Associated Features Syndicate to draw his first daily newspaper strip, The Lone Rider, which appeared under the name Lance Kirby.

The Lone Rider only found limited success in syndication and in an effort to augment his weekly paycheck, Kirby began freelancing at other studios where he came to the attention of Bert Whitman of Whitman Publishing. In 1939, Whitman hired Kirby to produce a science fiction adventure strip for weekly syndication. This strip chronicled the exploits of Adam Starr, the leader of Solar Legion, a peacekeeping unit that patrolled the war ravaged reaches of the galaxy. Despite its high-flying name, however, Solar Legion never managed to get off the ground as a syndicated strip and was quickly abandoned.

This cosmic tale would have been lost forever if not for the efforts of Frank Temerson. Temerson, the head of Tern Publishing, had established himself in the comic book market by purchasing the Comics Magazine Company and the Harry "A" Chesler comic-book lineup and selling both businesses to Centaur Publishing in 1938. Encouraged by the financial prospects in comic publishing, Temerson returned to the business in May of 1940 with *Crash Comics*.

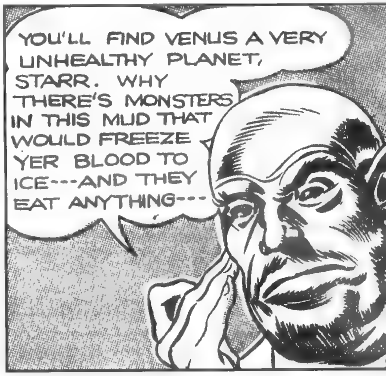
The majority of the work for *Crash Comics* was contracted through the Whitman studio. In addition to supplying new features (such as *Crash*'s greatest success, The Cat Man) Whitman provided several back-up features for the publication. One title that he happily lent to the pages of *Crash Comics*, was Solar Legion.

Appearing in the very first issue of *Crash Comics*, Solar Legion found a home, sharing its pages with Strongman, Buck Burke, Shangra, and the Blue Streak. These early stories were wonderful tales of intergalactic war and adventure. A cosmic odyssey of mythic proportions. A typical Solar Legion strip found Adam Starr rocketing off to Saturn where he sought to bring peace to the vicious war between two dictators, Mayo and Zara the Evil. In this tale, Starr utilized his knowledge of a imminent solar eclipse to convince Mayo that he had control over the Sun. After this display, Mayo renounced the war and joined Starr in his peace-keeping efforts. Together, they easily defeated Zara the Evil and brought peace to Saturn.

This early work showcased many of the traits that would later go on to become the staple components of classic Kirby storytelling; exciting, well-written plots, dynamic action panels, and creative page layouts. Although still a neophyte artist, Kirby was an innovator and for Solar Legion he used heavy ink lines to lend a more mature feeling to the strip's art. This strip also provided Kirby an opportunity to let his imagination loose and create those marvelous spacecraft and machinations that would later become such an important aspect of his art.

Crash Comics only lasted for five issues before it was re-titled Cat Man after its new star. Solar Legion unfortunately never made the jump to the new magazine. By this time, Kirby had left Whitman's studio for Fox where he met Joe Simon and began his seminal work on Blue Bolt. Solar Legion was apparently left behind and forgotten.

When one lists the heroes of Kirby's Golden Age work, Adam Starr of Solar Legion rarely comes to mind. This work, however, represented some of the earliest comic book output of Kirby's extraordinary career, predated only by his work on *Jumbo Comics* in 1938 and *Famous Funnies* in 1939. Later, the King would introduce us to such wonderful cosmic characters as Galactus, the Silver Surfer, and Darkseid and the New Gods. But it was in the little seen Solar Legion strip that the young Jack Kirby first laid down the foundations of his artistic career and set the stage for the epic intergalactic adventures that would follow. ■



Arthak, the space pirate and his Venusian fish-men show the early Kirby style. Even early in his career, Jack's imaginative art and story included such classic elements as swamp monsters, weird landscapes, heat-rays, and the carnivorous swamp-worm!

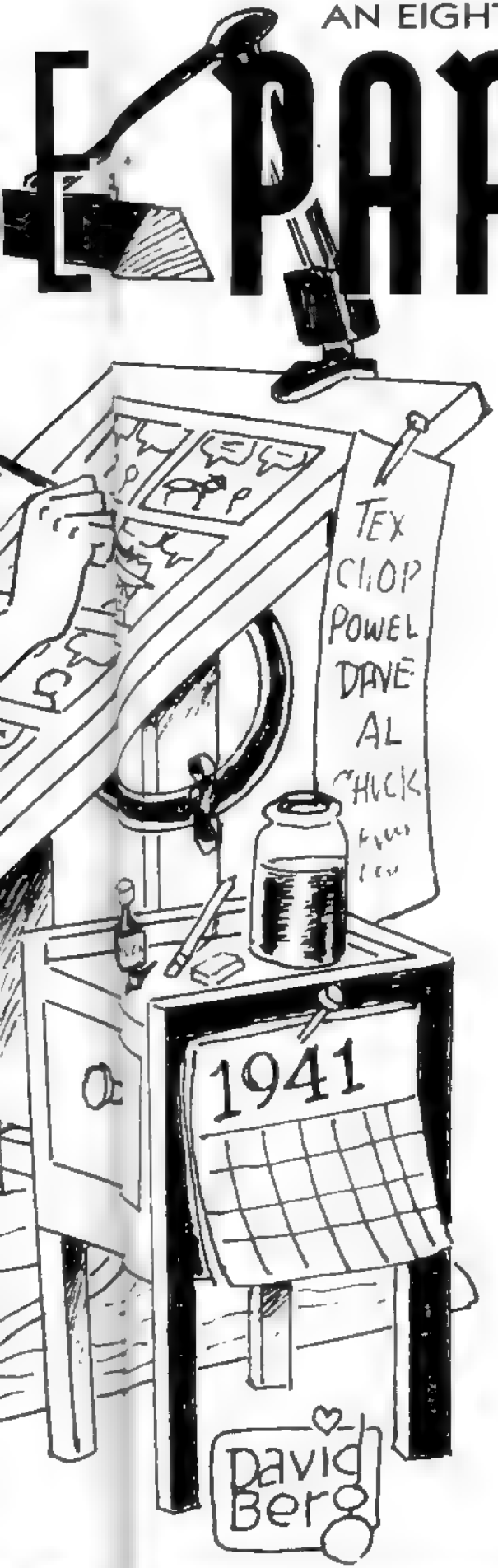
This article was submitted by The Comic Archives. The author, Todd Severin, is an internationally know Opthamologist specializing in glaucoma and is a Professor of Glaucoma at U.C. Berkley. He has authored over 40 journals and one book chapter on the subject.

NIGHT OF THE

Comic history will never be the same! For the first time, **WILL EISNER** with help from Tex Blaisdell, Dave Berg, Jules Feiffer, Al Jaffee, Alex Kotzky, Joe Simon, and Joe Kubert... tells it like it was during the early 1940s!

AN EIGHT-PERSON INTERVIEW **BY PETER DEPREE**

E PAPER NOIR



PROGRAM NOTES: In a discussion about art and cinema once, actor Rod Steiger winced when I called his cab scene with Marlon Brando in *On the Waterfront* larger than life.

"Kid," he said with a cocktail of sadness and bemusement, "there IS nothing larger than life."

And so it goes with the collective memories of Eisner and a handful of his Tudor City artists. There IS no projector to replay that innocent, tragic, creative, noir past.

Not really.

But here's a buffalo nickel anyway, it will get you on the el that crosses neon-lit prewar Manhattan, clattering towards a cramped brownstone apartment studio where (Holy Crow!) Blackhawk and Sheena, The Ray and the Spirit, Mr. Mystic, Joe Hercules, The Strange Twins, and the idle heiress Brenda Banks—Lady Luck, await.

Against a backdrop of tinny improvisational jazz, the cinematographer orchestrates a helicopter pan through the computer-generated '40s neon... The entire roof of the skyscraper is given over to filming the documentary, crammed with a variety of soundstages: Wildwood Cemetery, an exotic medina, a sludge barge, the Tudor City studio...

AUTHOR VOICE-OVER: "How much will culled from the flicks and how much from the mood-choked alley and byways of night lit NYC is open. He adored them both equally. That he found much of it grist for the atmosphere of Central City in 1940's Manhattan is certain.

SCENE I/RAINY FOOTSTEPS: The camera rolls back as Eisner, domino-masked, strolls toward it. His face is up-lit. A technician holds a boom-mike to the puddle-splashing footsteps.

In the Fall of '39 I was approached by the Des Moines Register Tribune Syndicate and Quality Comics Group publisher E. M. "Busy" Arnold to produce a comic book insert for syndication to Sunday newspapers across the country. The creation of the necessary characters in this 16-page freestanding supplement was left to me. For this I created The Spirit.

I was a 50% partner in Eisner & Iger then and prior to signing the agreement with Register Tribune Syndicate, I approached Iger and discussed it. Since our stockholder agreement stipulated that if either partner wished to leave the company, he must give the other first refusal, I sold him my portion.

Will walks out of a swirl of soupy fog and leans somewhat theatrically on a prop wharf piling: "One of the deals in the agreement between Iger and me was that I was not to raid his shop. We agreed to have a vote and I could take a few artists out of the shop who would want to join me. Bob Powell, Lou Fine, and Chuck Mazzullan said they would prefer to come with me—behind remained people like George Tuska and Reed Crandall.

One who didn't make the leap, but deserves mention, was a kid named Kurtzberg alias Kirby: "Jack Kirby was at Eisner & Iger for a relatively short time (circa 1938). Jack was a hard worker, very attentive to what he was doing. He was quite fast, quite strong in his draftsmanship and everybody in the shop admired him. Kirby was the guy who always took on stories with a gritty look. Powell loved to do what he called "classy stuff" where the artwork was kind of decorative. Each guy had his own style. As I remember him, Kirby had very little patience with intellectualism (laughter). He was not interested in it. He loved adventure. High action was present in whatever he was doing. In my book *The Dreamer*, I refer to him as 'Jack King', and

PREVIOUS PAGE

His enthusiasm for *CBM*'s special Eisner retrospective was enough for Dave Berg to back-burner his *MAD* work and to create this nostalgic sketch just for this article!

This Spirit splash is one that the author feels represents the highest cinematic genius of Will Eisner.

relate a little incident about him that demonstrates that. His dynamism always reminded me of John Garfield—that kind of hard drive, a seething internal—not anger, exactly—but certainly competitiveness. I still maintain that deep inside he was The Hulk! (laughter)

In the Eisner & Iger shop he kept pretty much to himself. Rather shy, he didn't socialize too easily. His name was Jack Koenigsberg back then.

As the film crew takes a break to rearrange the lighting, I hurry over to the studio bar. A P'Gell extra pours me a Bacardi and I move to the skyscraper's parapet to enjoy the cool breeze off the nocturnal continent of 1990's Manhattan spread out below in all its twinkling majesty. Then a familiar face is at my side. Joe Simon is excited by the Eisner footage: "Yeah!" he agrees with Will's take on Kirby's personality. "Absolutely, absolutely!" But then he chuckles—"*Koenigsberg*? It was Kurtzberg. Ask Will if *he's* losing his mind too."

I down my drink and tell Simon I need to get back to do the next Eisner interview segment, but he grabs my arm to share an irresistible anecdote: "I signed on as chief editor at Fox Comics at a time when Eisner and Iger had split with Fox. (Fox was in the same building with DC Comics, the Grand Central Palace at 480 Lexington Avenue in NY.) Eisner pulled out with all his staff because he sensed legal difficulties because *Wonderman* was being sued by *Superman*. So, when I became editor at Fox, Fox had decided that all the editors would be named Mr. Roberts—didn't even have a first name, just Mr. Roberts. And so if we left him we wouldn't have a past, so to speak. Fox had this idea, we ran an ad in the NY Times for the artists who did The Flame, the artist who did Wonderman, 'Call Mr. Roberts at Fox Publications.' The idea was to deplete the Eisner-Iger studio and hire everybody away from him. But the funny part is that Eisner himself had used these names, he was the artist who did several of these characters! Eisner, naturally, didn't call to answer the ad, and very few if any of the artists did. Because so many of them were Eisner himself! I had a fake name, and Eisner had all these fake names! Like a comedy!"

AUTHOR VO: "The choicer strips are overwhelmingly powerful—Eisner never feared exploring deep emotion—and one or two gems play out across the page like perfectly balanced, self-contained paper movies. 'My trademark is stagecraft,' Will has said before, a directorial tack exemplified in '*Hurricane*.'

"This short, 1949 paper noir is a classic example of Eisner's rich use of sable shadows, powerful emotion disguised beneath sardonic, witty dialogue, and hi-caliber panel direction. Snappy repartee from crime melodramas is introduced at just the right moments. What we might mistake today for a nostalgic or camp tinge was actually a special magic, one that never wasn't there.

The author waves his arms over Denny Colt's fifty-foot long face.

These crisp blacks, tightly plotted were compexly stylized without seeming at all so.

The author pauses in the title-block and gazes up directly into the camera:

"No comic cinematographer had tighter control of his camera, or was as daring and eager to travel the really extreme regions of the graphic terrain. Although other comic artists explored the black/white synergy (including Toth, Caniff, Wood, maybe a half dozen more . . .) few were able to exploit it as lushly—and often surprisingly—as comics' foremost noir director, Eisner.

TIGHT SHOT ON WILL'S HANDS

FILLING HIS PIPE: "In the course of my agreement with Busy Arnold and the Register Tribune, we set up a partnership, under which I would produce The Spirit, the ancillary characters (Lady Luck and Mr. Mystic), plus three other magazines—*Uncle Sam Comics*, *Police Comics*, and *HIT*.

It was a daring move for the 22 year-old entrepreneur: "I ventured into this, leaving a perfectly acceptable situation with Eisner & Iger—I was dissatisfied writing to a comic book audience consisting largely of thirteen and fourteen year old kids—not the older audience we have today. The adult newspaper audience gave me the platform to exercise something I had been dreaming about since I came into the field—an opportunity to write comic *literature*! Free to write anything I wanted, I focused on detective stories, creating a free-moving private-eye who could roam throughout the city. I wanted my stories to center around the city, because my entire literary nutrition consisted of tales by the '30s short-story writers of city life like O'Henry and Ring Lardner. Since this freestanding, free-moving detective would be outside the law, I could have him do anything, giving me the fulcrum for adventure, or whatever kind of stories I wanted to do." Thus was born Denny Colt, a lean and fast tenderhearted outlaw hero.

Keep in mind, I planned storylines far beyond the 'crime-does-not-pay' syndrome pandemic in those days. I discussed the ideas with Busy, proposing at first a simple detective or freelance investigator, but he objected, feeling the Syndicate would find a "costumed character" (a euphemism for today's 'superhero') easier to sell. We battled that back and forth and finally I conceded, but under no circumstances did I want to do a straight superhero. Superman was very hot at that point, Batman was beginning to boom and the Syndicate was determined to break into this comic book market, which to them read costumed characters. I compromised— 'Alright, I'll give you a costume.' I put a blue suit on him, gave him a domino mask, gloves. But that was as far as I would go. They accepted that. It was a 'costume' as far as they were concerned!

In a 1940 *Baltimore Sun* interview, just when I began The Spirit, I said I believed strongly that this was a true literary form. History has proved me right. As far as I was concerned, this was a medium I was going to spend my life in. And I believed implicitly that comics had capabilities of being *literature*, treating subject matter far beyond the simplistic 'trash 'em, beat em' up' kind of story.'

We take another break before shooting the next scene and again I run into Joe Simon at the bar. "Simon & Kirby was next door to Will Eisner in Tudor City' 1942-43. But I never saw his setup there and I don't think he came over. We were usually competitors. No, we were *always* competitors. But we admired him and his work, and he admired our work, I think.

I was up at his studio a couple times with some friends when Will was at Busy Arnold's place on Madison Ave, and I saw Lou Fine working there, and the guy who did Plastic Man, Jack Cole. All these working artists were so nice. The writers? I don't know, they're usually too drunk to talk. We used to call him Bill, and I had to train myself to start calling him Will, because everybody else did. In those days it was Bill Eisner. And he had a 16 year old secretary, Libby, who was in love with him. There was this engraving salesman, Arthur Weiss, who was in love with Libby. Ask Will if he remembers Libby, she was a very pretty girl."

"By and large I worked on The Spirit alone, with the exception of a letterer. When I left Eisner & Iger to start The Spirit, I rented a two-room Tudor City apartment as my studio. (I never liked to work at home.) One of the rooms was my own studio, the second occupied by other artists who came with me to produce this magazine section. Beginning with Dave Berg (who did Blackhawk, a character I created) the group included Lou Fine, Bob Powell, Tex Blaisdell, and Chuck Mazoujian. Later on we had a young kid come by in the afternoons to sweep floors and be of help—a kid named Joe Kubert. We all know what became of him!"

Eisner gets that far-off look of Hitchcock or Orson Wells setting up a crucial shot.

(A NEWSPAPER SPINS OUT OF THE SCREEN WITH THE SPIRIT SECTION) AUTHOR VO: "Eventually reaching a whopping 5 million copies per week, the Spirit insert made the entire Tudor City bullpen syndicated cartoonists with millions of readers!"

Unlike the more formal Eisner & Iger shop," Will continues, "it was a very casual working studio. Just guys sitting around in an apartment, really. The room was stripped of the usual furniture, just drawing boards and chairs, tabourets and stuff like that, with material pasted on the walls."

The grips dolly-in to a mockup foamcore model of the studio with a light burning, presumably late into the night.

A thousand and one adjectives crackle through Will's flamboyant art.

The author stands over the model as a lean, 6' 6" man with sagacious eyes gestures and points: "Tudor City," Tex Blaisdell explains, "was a posh uptown development of expensive apartments on the water, with uniformed attendants, strict parking regulations, the whole bit. We were up on the high ground in the (Continued on page 53)

Superworld Comics!

By Jon Berk

THE LATE 1930s AND EARLY 1940s WERE FULL OF COMpanies attempting to carve a niche in the fast growing comic industry. Some titles (and publishers for that matter) vanished before readers even knew they existed. It is time to dust off the old comic box again. This time around, we take a look at *Superworld Comics*, which not only was a short-lived title- three issues- but was the only title produced by famed science fiction pulp publisher, Hugo Gernsback. The books in the series were all slightly oversized- which increased their eye appeal. Published in 1940, this title appeared in April, May, and August of that year. This title proudly proclaimed in its opening editorial:

Here at last is a new and different kind of comic magazine. Having noted the trend of the present-day magazines in the field we believe that parents and educators will welcome this new monthly which, while admittedly a comic, yet is geared to give much valuable and educational information to the reader.

Let it be understood at once that nothing will ever be printed in this magazine that is downright impossible. All features are based on present-day science, and practically all of them are of an educational trend. The young reader is not confused and befuddled with impossibilities which can never come about, but at best give him an erroneous idea of man's inherent capabilities. Whatever scientific material is presented or whatever kinds of machines are used–all are within the realm of possibility. No superhuman feats impossible of accomplishment are printed. These can serve only to give totally wrong ideas of man's prowess.

Well, following this pitch to the parents about the scientific "reality" of this new comic, the first story is "Mitey Powers Battles Martians on the Moon". This inaugural tale is drawn (as are each of the covers) by Frank R. Paul, the great science fiction pulp illustrator who did many wonderful covers for early issues of Gernsback's Amazing Stories and also drew the cover to *Marvel Comics* #1. This tale finds Mitey Powers building a space flyer in order to prove to the world that the mysterious bombardments destroying cities on Earth are actually being shot by Martians from a base on the moon. Powers travels to the moon in his spaceship (named "Nina" after his girlfriend). Needless to say, although initially captured by the Martians, who use an "electric paralyzing ray" which encases him and his cohorts in green bubbles (the scene depicted on the terrific cover to this first issue), Powers escapes to direct Earth's space armada which finally destroys the Martian super-gun.

The second issue finds the Martians conciliatory, having deposed the leaders responsible for the attack on Earth. Powers accepts an invitation to be Earth's first emissary to the "superworld" Mars. While marveling at the wonders of this superworld, Powers learns of a plot to destroy Earth by the deposed leaders. By judicious use of "subelectronic guns" and space beams, Powers once again saves the Earth.

It is with issue three that "reality" strikes home, as Powers saves not only Earth, but also Mars from the diabolical machinations of the "Super Giants of Jupiter". On Mars, the Martians receive a message from Jupiter demanding that the Martians turn over all their radium to them. A similar demand is made of Earth- which Powers states will be the doom of each planet. He decides to journey to Jupiter to determine if they will negotiate a resolution. Even before he can get there, the Jovians drive his spaceship off, stating that they don't want to negotiate.

Powers returns to Mars where he hatches a new plot. After conversations with his Martian friends he brings a small iron chest onto his spaceship, which he has painted black to avoid detection by the Jovians.

Apparently this ploy is successful, because his second attempt to reach Jupiter is uneventful. He avoids the thousand-foot-tall Jovians and sneaks his way into the palace of one of the Jovian head honchos. He comes upon the sleeping official and releases the contents of his chest- which contains Martian poisonous gnats. The gnats puncture the skin of the sleeping giant and lay thousands of eggs, breeding more gnats which quickly spread to the Jovian populace- killing most of them. Following this act of genocide, Powers returns to Mars a hero, and he is heard from no more as the title ceased publication.

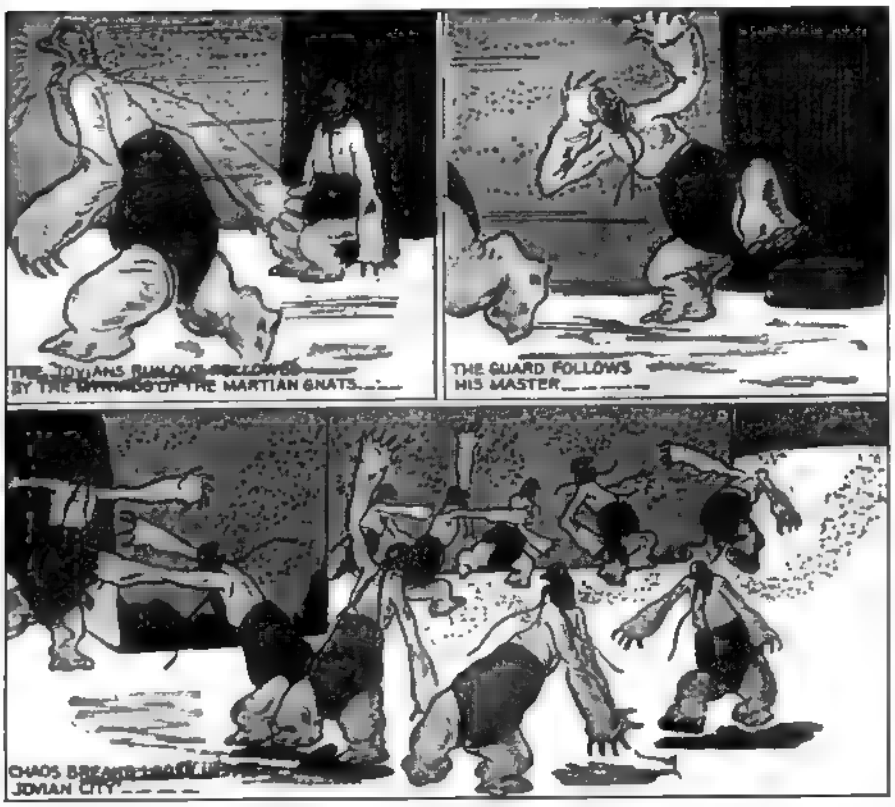
The Invisible Avenger

Okay, maybe the editors pushed the reality thing a little far in their first feature. The second feature of this title firmly yanked the reader back to terra firma–"Buzz Allen The Invisible Avenger". This is a feature about a young boy who is a radio ham enthusiast whose father was killed by protection racketeers. One day, while installing a "super-electron tube" to boost the power of his radio, Buzz notes

In a maneuver worthy of ethical scrutiny, Mitey Powers performs an act of genocide upon the inhabitants of Jupiter by releasing a horde of poisonous Martian gnats.

it makes his radio invisible. Adopting the tube for use with a belt, he and his friend, Will Lawrence, take on the racketeers in rather lackluster tales.

Their third and final adventure has them vacationing in Alaska, following light beams back to the hidden city of Atlantis. (Are you still with me?) There the city's leader, "Phatso", captures the boys and informs them he is going to take over America. The boys do in Phatso's diabolical plans by use of their electron guns, which escaped the detection of their captors because they were collapsible.



Hip Knox

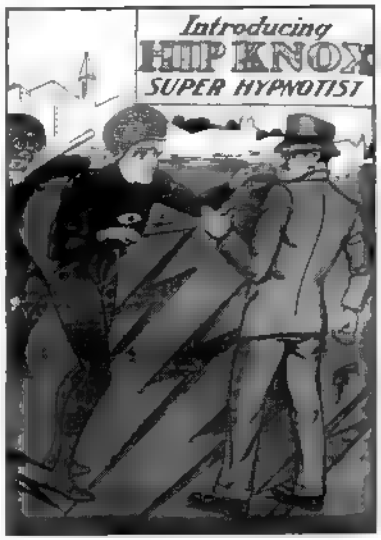
Okay, okay, let's avoid "superhuman feats" that are impossible. The next dose of "reality" is supplied by "Hip Knox The Super Hypnotist". Professor Knox is driven by the belief that he can change the world by endowing a human with super hypnotic powers. As fate would have it an infant is abandoned on his doorstep. Although seemingly dead from exposure to the elements, Knox revives the infant with a secret operation to the heart, head, and eyes. As the boy grows, he has exceptionally large eyes and a swelled head.

The boy can seemingly hypnotize man or beast with but a brief gaze. The Professor nicknames the boy, "Hip", (which the reader is told is short for hypnotism.) Boyhood bullies don't bother Hip, the last bully was left on the sidewalk in a "cataleptic hypnotic position" (say what!)

When Hip reaches the age of twenty-one Prof. Knox gives the boy a sporty outfit, essentially a skin-tight body suit with a large eye on the chest and what appears to be a bathing cap for headwear. It looks real nifty with his itsy-bitsy mustache. Hip solemnly pledges, "I swear never to use my hypnotic powers to do evil on this earth". Hip immediately dedicates himself to fighting crime and is able to "sense" crime.

Well, as it turns out, there lives in the city one Eric MacFadden, mortal enemy of the Knox family who has long dedicated himself to resisting being subjected to any hypnotic power. He discovers if he wears quartz lenses while his head is encased in a mesh cage (honest!) that he cannot be hypnotized. Their pointless confrontations come to a head in the third issue when McFadden captures Hip as he sleeps. He is bound and tied into a rocket plane which McFadden aims to land in the ocean. The plane overshoots its mark and Hip is able to escape his binds. The ship has no controls, but he hypnotizes millions of condors to fly into and under the rocket plane so to slow it down and cushion its fall. Stories end with McFadden imparting a "curse" as he escapes, "I'll get you yet.

To say that Hip Knox was anything but hip is an argument well-supported by some of the dorkiest art of the Golden Age. Hip's nemesis- in an anti-hypnotic helmet- is seen here sneaking up from behind.



Super Boy of the year 2680

Obviously, the editors saw that the magazine needed a greater dose of reality so they introduced in the second issue, "Marvo 1-2 Go, the Super Boy of the year 2680-prodigy, mastermind-explorer and adventurer". Marvo is the son of one of the world's greatest scientists. Heredity had given Marvo a powerful brain and magnificent intelligence. Marvo is only 15 years old but has the knowledge of "an average scientist of 40". The government has given Marvo

the great "+" sign, which has only been given to 10 men. This "+" sign entitles Marvo to use the super-hyponobioscope which teaches him while he sleeps.

Marvo's most "interesting" adventure (there were only two) has him flying off to intercept a strange planet which is on a collision course with Earth. Reaching what appears to be a dead planet, Marvo discovers an entrance to an inner world where he meets, and is captured by antmen of (what else?) Antar. The Antarenes have traveled from their dead sun in search of a new one. Their plan is to displace the Earth. While seemingly acquiescing to his captivity, Marvo escapes and destroys the machine that would have destroyed the Earth.

Little Nemo In Dreamland?

The rest of the issues are rounded out by a mystery feature, "Detective Crane", various pages of magic tricks, science facts, humor strips ("Alibi Alice", "Smarty Arty", etc.) and essays by Gernsback. To put the finishing touches on this eclectic title, several pages of "Little Nemo in Dreamland" by Windsor McKay are presented in each issue.

Neither this title nor this publisher went very far in the heyday of the Golden Age, although Gernsback's contributions to the science fiction field–especially *Amazing* which began in 1926–did influence comics in many ways, including being the favorite magazine of young Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster. However, if one seeks something decidedly different from the standard Golden Age superhero fare, with some terrific cover illustrations, *Superworld Comics* is a must. ■

Giant bugs and a rambunctious robot threaten Marvo 1-2 Go on *Superworld Comics* #3 (Aug 1940), the last issue of Hugo Gernsback's only comic title.

Hand-held thrusters propel Mitey Powers and associates towards his spaceship on *Superworld* #2 (May 1940). This classic Frank R. Paul cover is full of the old "pulp Sci-Fi" flavor.

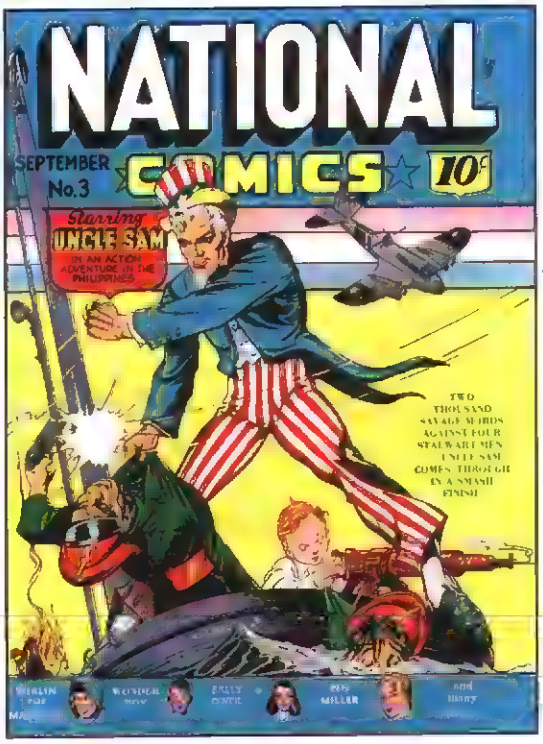
Artist Frank R. Paul's classic Martian on the cover of *Superworld Comics* #1 (Apr 1940) had appeared previously on the back cover of a 1939 Fantastic Adventures pulp as part of the "life on other planets" feature.

The ultra-rare second issue of Wow What A Magazine has Eisner's earliest cover credit.

Eisner developed Wonder Comics (featuring the "Superman-like" Wonderman) for Victor Fox.

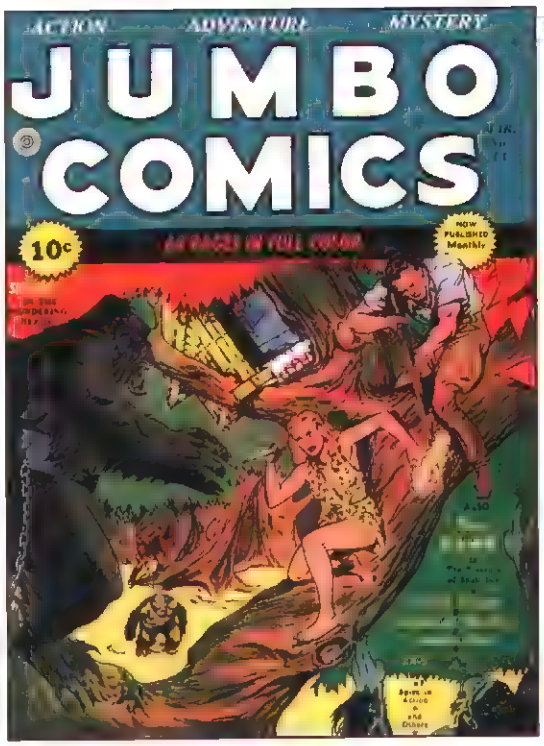
The five Fiction House issues of Spirit (all with remarkable covers) are in high demand.

Jumbo Comics #14 features Eisner's "new dynamic character" ...The Lightning!



The compelling cover art on Quality's Spirit #19 has become a graphic art classic.

A rare high-grade copy of National Comics #3 pits Uncle Sam against a raiding submarine and its evil officers.



Jumbo Comics #13 features a rare Eisner Sheena cover, complete with human-hunting gorillas!

Doll Man KO's a tommy gun-totin' gangster on the cover of Feature Comics #42.

IRON MAN/ SUBBY #1
Sub-Mariner's creator, Bill Everett, teamed up with Gene Colan on the cover of the "special once-in-a-lifetime" issue.

SPIDEY #96, 97, AND 98
This three-part Spidey versus Green Goblin epic was not approved by the Comics Code Authority due to graphic portrayals of drug abuse.

AVENGERS #100
Barry Smith assembled every Avenger in the team's decade-long history for this commemorative issue.

NOT BRAND ECHH #7, 8, & 9
Stan Lee's zany side expressed itself in this series that parodied the characters in the Marvel universe so that no one else would have to do it.

CBM COLOR GALLERY

BRAVE & BOLD #51
The second Brave and Bold team-up featured a monster that combined the powers of both heroes. This was Hawkman's seventh B & B appearance.

B & B #56
An alien super-being that can emulate the JLA members and their powers tests the mettle of the Martian lawman and the fastest man alive.

B & B #72
The cover to this far-out anti-team-up features Infantino and Anderson art and the infamous "go-go checks" seen during the end of DC's domination of the Silver Age.

B & B #53
The quickest hero and the smallest hero made a super-scientific team. And this issue's cover is one of the best of the "team-ups" run.

ALL COVERS & CHARACTERS © 1996 DC

WILL EISNER *(Continued from 33)*

Woodstock Tower this building here—over the East River with a long downhill cliff to the water area. Out the back window you could see the river. Down below, though, near this handball court here, was this slaughterhouse! That sort of put a crimp in the neighborhood.

When you came in the door of the two-room apartment, that's where we sat, what was probably supposed to be a living room, and then there was a door in the middle of the room turning right into the inside which was probably the bedroom where Bill had his setup. And the bathroom was off there too. It was smallish, it wasn't a huge place at all. It was cramped because we had so many guys in there—eight or ten drawing boards jammed into the living room. And more people moved in as time went by, and we had some writers sitting over in the corner. Dick French was there, he contributed to Blackhawk writing scripts… but Will mostly did it himself. Chris Hansen did artwork of some sort. Then we moved in Chuck Cuderra to do Blackhawk. Part of my duties was to help him finish up when Chuck couldn't make deadline. I did backgrounds and touchups… and I did the same thing with Lou Fine because he was so slow with his gorgeous pencils. If Fine couldn't make his thirty pages in thirty days, I'd help him sometimes. And once in a while Bob Powell would feel like having help so I would work on Mr. Mystic. Chuck Mazoujian was such a good artist he managed to snare himself a position in an executive capacity over at Pratt and left. Pratt was sort of a big University-type art school. You graduate with a diploma from Pratt and what you are is accomplished! When he stopped doing Lady Luck they moved in Nick Viscardi. But after the war he shortened his name to Cardi … we teased him about getting his Vis shot off during the war. Nick's still around… but I've lost track of him. With luck he's retired."

"Generally," Eisner remembers as he joins Tex and the author at the model, "in those days (the beginning of 1940) I worked from 9 a.m. till well past midnight, many times. I had this little couch in my room (you can see it here if you look closely) and would sleep there overnight occasionally. The Spirit was a very demanding project—the entire 16-page section had to be produced weekly, with no margin for error or lateness. Whereas in comic books or graphic novels you've got a lot of 'slippage', in the newspaper business—like radio or TV—you have no fail-safe time! It has to be delivered on a certain day.

"The coloring was done at the engraving shop, not internally, by making a silverprint, or black-&-white proof, of the line art. The color was suggested with Dr. Martin's Dyes, and then a code applied to each hue, which gave the engraver the combination of Ben Day screens to create that color.

Late 1940," Tex relates, "I was looking for work, and somebody suggested I go see Bill Eisner. (Nobody called him Will—to friends, associates, and family… he was Bill.) Bill thought my pitiful samples showed something, so he said "I'll give you a trial week and pay you fifteen bucks. Be here at nine o clock every morning and I'll give you something to do.' I was living in Whitestone, Queens, an hour's trip on the subway. He started me out on Spirit backgrounds, giving me a pile of his printed material as reference. So I started filling in blacks and crosshatch textures and this, that and the other thing.

Wednesday, he came around and looked at what I was doing, and I was replicating a texture he used previously. 'Who told you to do that?!' 'Well you gave me these things to look at and I saw that in this circumstance that's what you did, so I'm mimicking it.'' ''Okay, you're hired,' he said, 'I'll pay you twenty five bucks for the week and you just come in every morning.'

They roughed the artwork in and if necessary I would touch them up, but I mostly rendered them, tightening the pencils and inking. I would do some of the textures on covers, like if he had a stone wall, I might get to do some of the rendering on the stones or something like that. I remember doing scripting just on Blackhawk … Bob Powell was there doing Mr. Mystic, Chuck Mazoujian was doing Lady Luck, Lou Fine was sitting over in the corner doing The Ray. Bob Powell was in the other corner. Chuck Mazoujian was in the middle of the room. Davey Berg was over there.

Davey Berg?

I don't know what everybody else called him, 'you lousy sonuvabitch' or something," Tex chuckles, "No, he's very nice. As a matter of fact he's one of the coupla guys that came to my wedding."

Tex was sort of right-hand man to Will," Al Jaffee recalls, "he did backgrounds and may have done lettering and did a lot of consultation with Will. He was in Will's office almost all the time, problem-solving and helping out."

One of the pivotal geniuses of Golden *and* Silver Age comic art (and beyond) Joe Kubert today runs the highly respected School for Cartoonists in Dover, New Jersey.

Dave Berg's decades-long MAD opus reflects a crucial representation of suburban America. With research and scripting help from his wife, The Lighter Side Of…strip has taken its place in the childhood of millions of Americans.

CUT TO NIGHT SCENE, AUTHOR VO: "A scrawny kid with sleepless circles under his eyes clenches his fists in anticipation and gazes out over a night-lit 1941 Manhattan as the el goes clattering on through the chill night... That buffalo-

A nostalgic reminder of the sheer span of Eisner's career. These four-color archetypes were the graphic embodiment of an adolescent America on the brink of the greatest fight it would ever see.

nickel ride on the el brought him to a bedroom apartment too small for ten artists but roomy enough to hold a Milky Way of superhero adventures. Joe Kubert remembers the Tudor City studio like it was yesterday":

"Will was so involved and so much a turning point and an opening up for me coming into the business, I couldn't begin to tell you. I was about eleven or twelve years old, just starting out at the High School of Music and Art. That's as long as I've known Will. And this has been an ongoing relationship. Until he moved down to Tamarac, Florida, we were able to see each other quite often.

"Somehow I was directed up to Tudor City, just trying to break into the business. I don't know if Will himself hired me or Tex Blaisdell–who is actually teaching at my school now! Tex was one of the first guys I met working up at Will's office. In all probability," Kubert continues, "it was Will who hired me because he gave the last word on everything. It was through that full-time summer job with Will, that I also met Jerry Iger. Jerry and Will were collaborating on several publishing deals."

This page from the very first Spirit story (produced at Tudor City, June 2, 1940) is the primitive inception of a sixty-year-long career for the freelance detective. Here's to a jazzy seventh decade!

Here's how Tex recalls the whiz kid destined to do big things with Hawkman: "Kubert was six or seven years younger than I, a snot-nosed little punk when I first met him. But a swell handball player. We would go out at lunch time and play handball down by the slaughterhouse below Tudor City. Oh, did it stink... wow!"

"I lived in Brooklyn," Kubert goes on, "east New York, and attended the High School of Music and Art up on Convent Avenue and 135th Street. It took me about an hour and a half by subway–at a nickel a ride! That was a little while ago (laughs.) After school at two thirty or three o'clock, I'd ride all the way up to 135th and Will's place was off 42nd Street on the East Side, Tudor City, where the U.N. now have their offices in Manhattan.

"My initial duties were sweeping up the place. Chuck Cudeira was doing Blackhawk up there at the time, and I had the privilege of erasing, cleaning up, and whiteing out his stuff. Bob Powell was doing Mr. Mystic. I was really lucky to be able to see that original work going under my hand, it was a wonderful learning experience."

"I worked right through the summer. They were turning out Spirit pages and magazines at the time at his Tudor City studio setup. He also allowed me to do half-pagers at the end of the seven-page supplement they supplied the newspapers. Looking back now, and remembering how terrible the stuff I did was... it's amazing that he gave me those kinds of opportunities–I was just a kid! His permitting me to learn on the job like that was just a marvelous, marvelous opportunity. Most of the other guys I knew were sixteen and seventeen and already out of high school by that time. I was lucky enough to be able to do it while going to school and during the summer... which gave me a real head start."

"I'll never forget that place as long as I live. I remember that as clearly as if it happened yesterday. It was a regular two-bedroom apartment with Will separated from the rest of us in one of the bedrooms where he worked by himself. The rest of the bullpen–the letterer and other artists–took the other room. I didn't really get to see Will too often because he was ensconced in the master suite working like crazy. In addition to Cudeira, Powell, and Tex, Dave Berg who works for *MAD Magazine* was just starting to work there and there was Nick Viscardi who did Lady Luck after Powell left. Absolutely outstanding artists, an inspiration to anyone who wanted to break into the business. And I might add, the kindest and most patient people in the world! Here's this young kid flittin' around and aching to do this kind of work, and I guess they recognized it. They spent all kinds of inordinate time with me teaching me the way to do things. It was just a wonderful experience."

CAMERA DOLLIES BACK as Dave Berg speaks. The caller was asking him to remember six months spent in a dim, cigar-box studio tucked way back in the early '40s–all the way across the country and more than a half century ago. (Oy vey! But how was it that he recalled it with such crystal clarity?)

CAMERA FOLLOWS as he moves to the glass and furrows his brow "I've had a long career now, but that period when I was in Eisner's Tudor City studio was the most interesting I've ever had in all these years. All the memories! They're all kinds of memories!"

BACK ON THE STAGE SET: Later that night we find Eisner sneaking out from his cot after another 18-hour day, prowling NYC subways at night in search of choice characters like some noir vampire bat. Story settings, villains and heroes, snatches of dialogue crystallized in wharf spume and thick manhole steam. Much of that Central City chutzpah energizing the Spirit strip was absorbed during these nocturnal forays

STORY CONFERENCE: IN RESPONSE TO YOUR QUERY RE: 'How much of The Spirit's personality is in Will Eisner?' Well, how much isn't?

The facade is lit with fake drizzle and, after being fitted

DRENCHED IN THE LIQUID, DENNY SINKS TO THE FLOOR... DR. COBRA DRAGS HIS AIDE OUT THROUGH A SECRET PASSAGE...

AND BEHIND THEM, DIMLY OUTLINED BY THE STRANGE LIGHT CAST BY THE EQUALLY STRANGE CHEMICAL, THE BODY OF DENNY COLT LIES RIGID... UNMOVING!

A FEW MINUTES LATER, A SIREN SHATTERS THE QUIET OF THE NIGHT AS DOLAN AND HIS MEN ARRIVE ON THE SCENE....

HURRY UP, YOU MEN! DENNY MAY BE IN TROUBLE!

THERE'S BEEN A SCRAP! LOOK!! THAT'S DENNY LYING IN THE POOL OF WATER!

DEAD! GET THE CORONER, KELLY!

THIS MAN'S DEAD ALL RIGHT! RIGOR MORTIS HAS ALREADY SET IN! I'D CALL IT HEART FAILURE... NO SERIOUS WOUNDS.

HEART FAILURE. DON'T SEEM RIGHT! NO... HE WAS A GREAT KID... I LIKED HIM.

NEXT DAY...

Obituary...

FUNERAL RITES HELD TODAY.

DENNY COLT, CRIMINOLOGIST, KILLED WHILE ATTEMPTING TO CAPTURE A NOTORIOUS MAD-MAN...

THE FOLLOWING NIGHT, IN A SUBURBAN CEMETERY, A FANTASTIC SIGHT MEETS THE EYE...

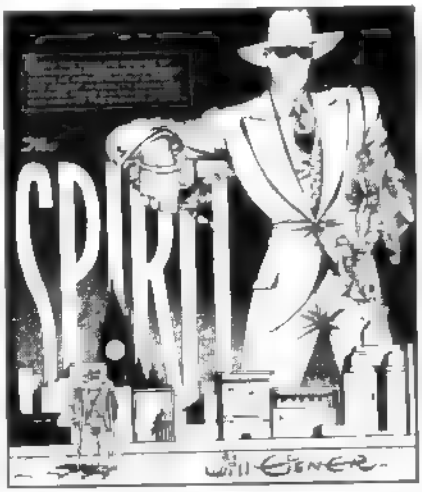
AN HOUR LATER, AT POLICE HEAD-QUARTERS IN COMMISSIONER DOLAN'S OFFICE...

HEY! HOW'D YOU GET IN?

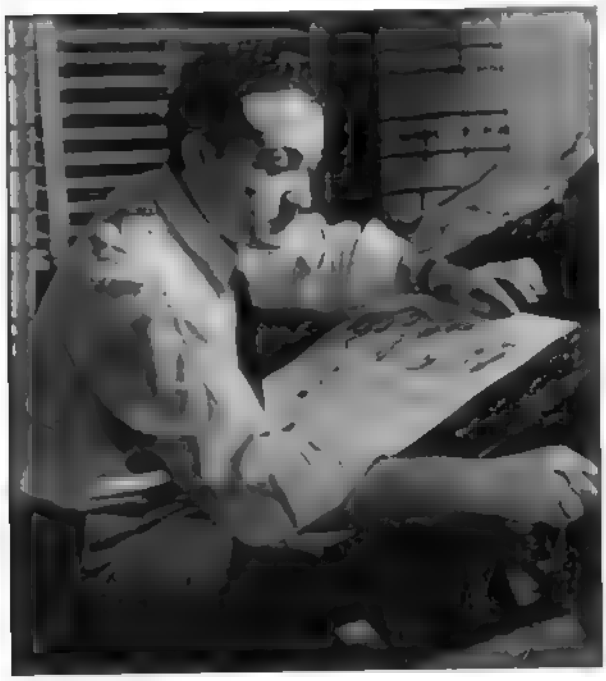
KEEP YOUR SEAT, COMMISSIONER, AND I'LL DO THE TALKING! DON'T REACH FOR THAT GUN... THAT'S RIGHT, JUST SIT BACK AND LISTEN!

3

with a pair of lapel microphones, the author and Eisner stroll slowly through a cosmetic recreation of 1940's Manhattan. "The city—New York—has always fascinated me, so my work has centered around an environment—like Faulkner's South, John O'Hara with his lower aristocratic class environment in Pennsylvania, and so forth." In spite of the drizzle, it's a hot summer night in the stage-like setting and many are asleep on the fire-escapes. A Panaflex on a giraffe crane tracks us along the crowded alleys and avenues with down-angle shots. We pass a kosher slaughterhouse then down an alley of sweatshops to a cramped honkytonk tucked under a clattering el line. The streets are packed with ethnic extras—Irish, Italian, German, Eastern European Jew, Chinese.



Eisner drinks it in. "The big city has always intrigued me as a place of great theater with a huge amount of story material constantly available, an environment I know and understand. All the lighting and shadow work on my characters is derivative of city lighting which comes from above, whereas in a rural environment, light comes from all sides. The streetlights and alley shafts and so forth that I lived with influence my art. To this day, I draw these things sans reference because I have a keen visual memory of them."



A pensive Eisner reaches for a Winsor-Newton. Part those blinds and you would see the leftover deco neons of a jazz-suffused Manhattan.

When Dave Berg told me he had always viewed Will as an older brother figure, he didn't really have to. You hear it in his voice. "Will taught me something important... He said—'You're not a cartoonist, you're the director, the actor, the set designer, the whole motion picture, is you!' I have never forgotten it, and I still work on that."

It was the first art job I ever had. Now Tudor City itself, especially in those days, was quite a prestigious neighborhood. Technically, Tudor City is not a city, it's a group of houses called Tudor City. Will cobbled together a studio out of an apartment. Unfortunately he chose too small and compact an apartment, we were even in the kitchen! I still remember exactly where everyone sat.

I discovered Eisner in 1941 when I was 20 years old. Somebody at Cooper Union showed me some Spirit work and said he was related to Will somehow. He showed my Cooper Union classroom work to Eisner and Eisner said—'Yeah, tell him to come Monday.'

Will called him back later. 'Hey! I have no room to put him in! Tell him not to come.' Well, he didn't make that call so I showed up Monday, and Eisner exclaimed—'Oy! I told him to tell you not to come, I have no room for you!' And I'm standing there and he says—'Well, as long as you're here I can use you. We'll make room.' He starts pushing things around, creating a little corner, but he didn't even have a desk or chair for me! Within an hour one of the supply houses delivered a drawing table, chair and tabouret. If I had gotten that message it would've been a whole different beginning, because he was the best to start with, so brilliant, so talented.

Kubert agrees. "I tell ya, I can almost smell the place! I can smell the India ink, I can smell the aroma of the comic books themselves, the pulp paper they were printed on. It's as vivid to me today as it was when I first walked in there to work. I remember where the guys had their tables stacked up against the walls in that comparatively small room. In retrospect of course, I was just a kid, so that the place probably looked a heckuva lot bigger to me than it actually was! But I remember that there were four, five guys in what might be called a studio—in actuality a living room and bedroom. We were stacked against the perimeters of the walls. My job was sweeping up the place, keeping things tidy, but really the preponderance of my work involved cleaning up the other artists' work when they were finished inking, erasing the pencil from underneath the ink, whiteing out, stuff like that. It is part of the procedure instead of wasting the artist's good time in erasing—if you have seventeen, fifteen pages it may take you quite some time to clean up the whole job, and would waste their time and their talent. In two or three hours these guys could bang out another page instead of erasing their material, and that's why they hired me.

"Okay, it really is a menial job, but to me it was just great. I loved it, loved it. That was to me one of the greatest experiences I could have had at that time, simply because it permitted me to see the work, to really examine it and find out how the heck they actually put it together. I got really enthusiastic about what I was doing! I recall working on some Blackhawk illustration and artist Chuck Cuidera was working right there in the room. The cover design had

Blackhawk climbing a hemp rope, silhouetted against the moon. I even recall which cover it was! (Laughing.) As I was whiteing it out, I got so involved with the little hairs sticking out of the hemp rope that, instead of just cleaning it up, I started putting hairs into the rope! I was so enthusiastic about what I was doing that I didn't realize what the heck was happening. I was so proud of what I had done till I gave the stuff back to Chuck. 'Chops' looked at it and kind of shook his head with a tsk tsk. 'Look Joe, just clean this stuff up. Don't draw!'

STORY DEPARTMENT: Such a trivial detail to remember this many decades later–but pivotal, drawing the hairs on a hemp rope! Where's that brat who plays the young Kubert? Let's get an over-the-shoulder shot of him drawing here.

If Kubert experienced those historic days as a slumber party atmosphere where he could eavesdrop on the older boys' wisecracks and picpocket artistic shortcuts, Eisner deemed Tudor City a more formalized creative hotbed: "In a shop like that there's a *tremendous* amount of influence between members, like a schoolroom or art class where you have an opportunity to see what the other guy's doing, which can't help but influence you! 'Oh yeah! That's a good idea, I think I'll try that kind of stuff in what I'm doing.' That plus a healthy dose of competition certainly had an effect. Cross-influences pervaded the shop's atmosphere."

Al Jaffee agrees: "The Tudor City experience was very short but very interesting and vivid. Great talent. And it was so invigorating and interesting because we were creating *together*.

You know, I've spent my life freelancing and you just sit in a studio by yourself all day, but being in a bullpen with the likes of those guys there was a lot of excitement and you're picking up all kinds of tips. I'd stand there and watch Powell and Nick doing their thing, watching how they ink and all that kind of stuff and it was just fascinating.'

Dave Berg recalls assisting Cuderra: "Blackhawk was done by Chuck, he started it and I would assist him doing backgrounds. Around '41, before WWII started. Chuck was a very good artist. (He was half Italian, half-Jewish. The other Chuck Mazoujian–was all Italian.) I remember he had a very interesting airplane and when there was a smaller version of the plane to draw, I would do that. That kind of thing. But Chuck handled the scripts himself.

"It wasn't as fractured doing the work back then," Kubert remembers, "Today you have pencilers, inkers, background people and people who do just breakdowns for somebody to refine the pencils. At that time every artist that I know of did the whole job: penciling, inking and very often the writing and lettering as well.

Tex sees the same distinction: "The main difference back then was that most of the guys did the whole thing themselves. They've become increasingly specialized since. In those days we did the whole damn thing ourselves, in the case of Bob Powell, he wrote and drew it, and so did Chuck Mazoujian, and Nick. Lou, though, could hardly be depended upon to ink because he took so long to pencil. But Chuck Cuderra contributed to the story ideas and drew it all himself.

"I'd brown-bag it just like I did when I was going to school," Kubert continues, "It took me about an hour each way to commute back and forth from New York, and I was paid for that the munificent sum of $12.50 a week. Now that was a lot of dough, dough that I sincerely appreciated! It was not long after the Depression, and 25¢ was still a helluva lot of dough. I have no arguments with that. It's probably more than I was worth at the time! (Laughs.)

"My only stint on The Spirit involved inking Lou Fine's pencils. I tell you, I was so young and naive. Lou Fine's pencils *didn't even frighten me*! I learned so much from just watching Lou work. Just to give you an idea, his pencils were of such a nature that it became dependent on the inker to select the right lines. Lou didn't just do an outline of the figure; you could see the *construction* or the *building* of what he was doing. And then it was up to the inker to select the right places to put the ink lines down. *That* was a real learning experience. Although detailed, his pencils were not completely cleaned up, so he allowed a certain margin of

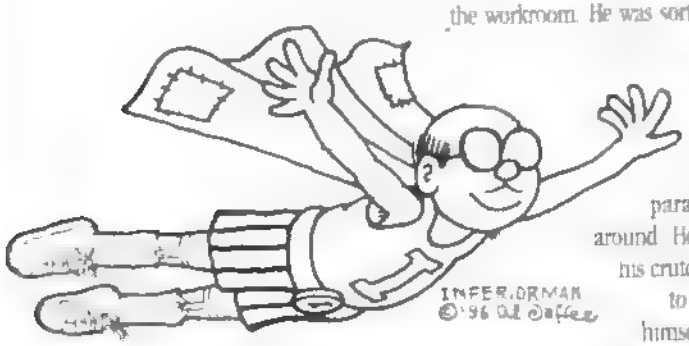
From the swampy ghettos to the Bakelite-&-chrome trimmed skyscrapers, Eisner's artwork reflects a lesson learned on those hours-long nocturnal Manhattan wanderings: that the city itself was the one undeniable personality in many of his stories.

flexibility to the inker, and I was just lucky. *Really* lucky!

Al Kotzky, the next youngest to Kubert, worked over the Secret Master's breakdowns too, noting the profound impact it had on his own style: "As a matter of fact," he groans, "Lou's penciling was so good I often ruined them. It was amazing just sitting behind the guy and seeing him go through this stuff—and then working on it yourself! It's had a lasting effect. He knew how good he was yet he never bragged about it, and he treated me completely as his equal, instead of just a young kid starting in the business. He was about 25 and I was just 18 at the time."

Others qualified their admiration for Lou's interpretation of Eisner's character. "Lou preceded my being there," Feiffer recalls. "He was there during the war years, and started out imitating Eisner's style very well but it evolved into his own style which didn't seem to me right for the Spirit *at all* and I didn't care for it. I ignored those years.

"Lou was a very quiet, sweet person who just sat there and did his great stuff," Tex recalls. "But he didn't contribute to the songs and snappy patter that went on in the workroom. He was sort of a short guy with tremendous shoulders and arms from dragging his paralyzed legs around. He'd come in on his crutches, barely able to maneuver by himself, and sit over in the corner, standing his crutches behind him. He didn't have any personality. He just sat there and did this gorgeous material… and made everybody gulp and swallow when they looked at this stuff he could do. Even though he fussed with it so much he couldn't maintain a fast schedule, it was so great anybody would buy it.



Vacationing in Provincetown, MAD artist Al Jaffee sketched Inferiorman for the author, and threw in the endearing self-caricature.

Oddly, Al Kotzky, the man who would end up knowing Lou best, remembers it differently: "As far as I know, he never used a crutch, he may have worn a brace but I couldn't see it because of his trousers. But I was never aware that he had something to help him, he just had a limp.

"I admired Will Eisner," Joe Simon says, "He was probably my favorite creative person in the whole business. My favorite *artist* was Lou Fine. He was also Jack Kirby's favorite artist. I know that Jack was a fan of and greatly influenced by Fine's artwork."

Lou Fine died early, but Berg recalls late night gab sessions with the same wizard. "Lou was two floors above us and I often visited with him. There was no room for him in our studio because we were all jammed up, so Will got him another small apartment. He could afford it, Eisner was doing financially very well. By the time he went into the Army he had $300,000 and was about 25 years old—*during the end of the Depression!* That was such a huge amount of money in those days, like having a million dollars. Remember, he was a publisher/editor and he was making big money."

The time was ripe for it. Kubert recalls a thriving four-color industry back in those early '40s. "There were about twenty-five different publishers. The two largest at the time were DC and the place that put out Captain Marvel, along with more than twenty other smaller places. I used to make the rounds regularly with my buddy Norman Maurer, we attended the High School of Music and Art together. And because we had the same affinity for this kind of artwork, we grouped together and would go out almost every day after school, or play hooky, and hit every publisher and every editor we could to scare up work. This is during and after the time I was working for Eisner. Norm and I were constantly on the go. Norm had worked with Charlie Biro doing Crimebuster and Daredevil—at about the same age as I. As far as I'm concerned, Will Eisner is one of *the* certifiable geniuses in our business. Everybody and anybody who has seen his work and has read it, has to appreciate it for what it is."

Feiffer, in turn, characterizes Kubert as one of the few remaining grandmasters. "Joe's drawing over the years developed into some of the best art one sees in comics. I admire him enormously. And there's a lot of good graphics out there, but I don't know the names of these people. I don't read comics anymore."

"I was with Eisner up to about '43," Alex Kotzky remembers, "when I went in the service. A friend of mine from high school, Al Jaffee, (right, the *MAD* fold-in artist) decided he wanted to go up and show his work to Will, cause he'd been up there before, and he figured as a good excuse to take my work along. Because apparently if he went up on his own, Eisner might have just given him another quick shrift! So he took my work up and I got the job, penciling and inking Spirit backgrounds. Al got a page, Inferior Man. I was penciling for Chad Grothkoph who worked for DC Comics and then when Al took my stuff up to Will, a few months before Pearl Harbor, I left Grothkoph."

Al Jaffee offered more background on the story: "After graduating from the High School of Music and Art, I was living at home in the Bronx and going to work by subway. I was nineteen and created a feature called Inferior Man—a silly Superman take-off (but considering Superman couldn't have been very old back then, I guess I was a bit ahead of my time!) When somebody mentioned that Eisner might be interested in something like that as a filler, I went up to see him in Tudor City and was really surprised when he offered me a job at $10 a week. And that's how the whole schmeer started. He gave me a desk behind Dave Berg, and

Dave and I became close friends, going out to lunch together and so on. I can't remember anything other than Dave Berg eating mints all the time! He constantly had a bag full of mints that he consumed.

I did Inferior Man as a one or two-page filler for Quality and it appeared in *Military Comics* ("Stories of the Army and Navy"). I was doing the whole thing, including the lettering. I got to know Frenchie (Dick French) a writer who worked on The Spirit, and Tex Blaisdell, and Nick Viscardi. I envied Nick because he was such a terrific comic book artist and looked up to him as "the older guy" because he had more experience at that point than I did. They were the big guys, Bob Powell was doing Lady Luck, Dave Berg was doing Death Patrol, Uncle Sam was being done by Lou Fine with Eisner's assist, Chuck Cuderra was doing the lead feature in *Military Comics*, really beautifully done. But the Spirit was really the powerhouse. Outside of the studio I didn't have access to it because it didn't appear in any New York City papers! (I think it appeared in Philadelphia and a few other places.) But from what I did see—a lot of originals up in Tudor City—the stories were just great. But to me the design aspect, especially his splash pages, were brilliant. I felt that Will was a fantastic designer whose designs carried the stories forward brilliantly. I think he was a 23-year-old guy at is and I was 20, or something like that. I was in awe of Will Eisner, even though he wasn't that much older than me. Sheesh—I don't even know if he's older than I am *at all*! My memory of Will was that he was just an awesome *wunderkind*! He was so young and so smart and so quick and so bright and just a very talented guy and the Spirt was kind of like magic!

But then Will had to let me go, for whatever reason. He said he liked my stuff and all that but he let me go and he arranged for me to go over and do the same thing with Ed Cronin and his group, very nice man, one of the early people in the comic book business. He had a little studio and I did a couple of Inferior Man's for him, the same character. They all had some tie-ins. I was just a kid interested in drawing for whoever would buy it. And then that kind of broke up and I was on my own. So, I said to Alex Kotzky, "Why don't we form a partnership? I tell you what, I'll take a sample of my work and a sample of your work, I'll cover the Bigfoot comedy angle and yours will be the great straight stuff." Alex was really excellent and he did just beautiful drawings of various kinds of superheroes for Timely. I made a portfolio, a couple of pieces of mine and a couple of pieces of Alex's and I went out to Eisner and Eisner *immediately* wanted Alex! So that was the end of our partnership, because he hired Alex.

Kotzky picked up the story: "That first week that I started working there Eisner sat down with me to point out some of the things I was doing wrong—'You either gotta produce the stuff, or we can't use you.' Which gave me pause to think. But after a coupla weeks I got the hang of it and from then on it was smooth sailing. I was there with Chuck Cuderra, Tex Blaisdell. Sam Rosen was the letterer. Bob Powell did Mr. Mystic and Nick Viscardi did Lady Luck."

Did Kotzky feel the hectic deadlines hampered the artists? "No. I don't think so. They worked at a fairly leisurely pace. Four pages per week really didn't seem to be any strain on Nick Viscardi and Bob Powell. Then again, *everything* was good as far as I was concerned in those days, and when I think back on it now there wasn't anybody other than Will or Lou Fine that I really thought was great stuff."

"Al Jaffe," Berg recalls, "was at the studio for a very brief period doing Inferior Man, a single-page continuing feature in one of the books. But, as he confessed, we hardly paid him—$10 a week or something like that! That's the only thing about Eisner, he's not a big payer, especially compared with Gaines who was very generous."

But Will had a soft spot, too. "In mid-'41," Tex recalls, "I went and asked him for a raise because I wanted to get married. He blanched—'How much did you imagine?' Well, I said, we figured out that we could do it on $35. So he regained his color and said 'That'll be fine.' He gave me the extra ten bucks and we got married on it. And on that $35 we had a little rattletrap car my grandmother had given me, a '31 Plymouth with a rumble seat, and a three-room apartment, *with* garage. And every week on the way home I put $5 in the bank and bought a book from a bookstore down

Alex Kotzky, pre-WWII. Eisner recognized this precocious talent immediately, and anyone who admires the svelte and easy line of Kotzky's syndicated strip Apartment 3G (below) knows genius when they see it as well.

the block. On $35, with groceries, gas, and everything, you could do that in those days!

Powell's name was really Polaski," Dave Berg chuckles. He came from a rich, noble family in Poland. His Majesty really let the rest of us know it.' He also did something that I thought was very peculiar. He was engaged to a girl and had her picture plastered all over the studio. He goes away one weekend and comes back married to *another* girl! It was the weirdest thing I have ever seen. He met her that weekend while engaged to another girl and they ran off and got married… in one weekend."

Powell did an airplane feature," Jaffee recalls, "not Blackhawk, Loops 'n' Banks or something like that, a Flying Aces kind of deal. His style was not as realistic as the superhero style, more a kind of crossing over from traditional cartooning of an earlier era into the modern super drawing staff of the Milton Caniff school of that time."

Will Eisner stayed busy through the war years turning out a prodigious sampling of training manuals, posters, gag cartoons and morale-boosting cheesecake sketches!

Bob Powell," Joe Simon supplies, "was 53 when he died. Bob was from Buffalo. Powell wasn't his real name, he had some kind of Polish name, one of those ten syllable gizmos."

Originally," Berg continues, "I was hired to be Eisner's assistant doing Spirit backgrounds and helping out wherever I could, and when he wasn't using me the others would. But very quickly I was out of that because I had my own success and was busy with my own features.

It was an unbelievable time, so interesting—a very positive and very pleasant situation being with him. Will changed my life with three words. The first time he gave me anything to illustrate, I read the script and said— 'Will, this isn't a very good story.' 'Can you rewrite it?' he shot back. I said, 'I'll try.' Well I did. For which he paid me $30, a lot of money in those days. And then he said the words that changed my life: 'You're a writer.' I had no intention of being a writer, but from then on.

"He then assigned me the job of writing the first issue of Uncle Sam, the whole book! What a jump—here I'd never even thought of being a writer! But I did it with such enthusiasm, I was so excited, a whole new field had opened up. The book was extremely successful. I only did the first book though. Tex Blaisdell and I would talk over the plot and then I would write it. Tex was a good assistant, he could do backgrounds.

We were late turning out *Uncle Sam* and Will had me come in on Saturday, he and I did final touch-up. That was a new thing to me, to work on a Saturday! It was a five-day week and that's the first time I ever heard of it. Well, that's the kind of office Will ran. Will inked my pencils, and said he was thrilled with the job I did. I also penciled most of the comic before it was handed out to inkers. Some of the books that have come out since have gotten the information wrong, giving the art credit to the inkers instead of to me and Tex."

Freelancers popped in occasionally. Kotzky recalls Klaus Nordling, "a short, Finnish guy with a moustache who came in after Nick Viscardi but didn't work in the studio. He wrote his own stuff (like Lady Luck) at home and delivered the work to Tudor City.

Berg shrugs: "It was unfortunate that I had to leave the office but they were overcrowded, with all of us jammed into that living room and kitchen. I didn't get fired, Will moved me to another studio he had part-ownership of, but I didn't like it and didn't stay there long. It was such a changeover from having the best talents of all. He shipped me down to his other office, and I didn't like those people whatsoever. They were terrible and amateurish… and I stayed there only a very short time.

"Occasionally" Eisner reflex: "I'd have someone like Powell help me on backgrounds, but I was working pretty steadily and quite heavily. I had people come in and do lettering for me. In those years it was people like the late Ben Oda, a classic letterer for the whole comic book field. I didn't have a staffer lettering in shop until later on when I had Abe Kanegson—the one whose lettering I always admired and who worked best with me and had a philosophical affinity for my work. He appeared in my shop after WWII, in 1947. I don't know whatever happened to him. As a matter of fact, Jules Feiffer and I tried to locate him years later, but he seems to have disappeared.

Tex recalls the lettering genius this way: "Abe Kanegson and Bill had a terrible fight at some point, they yelled and screamed and jumped up and down and Abe quit. I ran across him later after the war, when I had pages to do. He did my breakdowns and I discovered he was pretty good, I didn't have to fix anything… all I had to do was put faces on it and ink it.

"I always required imaginative lettering," Will continues, "because I regarded it as a vital part of the art, integral to the story, not as a necessary evil. I sought to achieve sound-effects by having some letters done heavily in boldface, some lightly, some in differing styles, to accommodate the story thrust."

INTERMEZZO: As the cameramen take a break, Eisner strolls across the studio stage set to get two period bottles of National Bohemian pale beer chilling on the fire-escape. A skinny kid tosses a push broom into the closet and dashes off stage, presumably to catch the el back home. A muscular, red-headed man with a cork-stemmed Japanese brush over his ear and Coke-bottle glasses lurches by on crutches, a pile of oversized Red Bee original art tucked under his arm. When I reach out to tap his shoulder my hand passes through him. As he trudges upstairs to another apartment, you can almost make out the rose wallpaper through his ghostly holographic form (courtesy of ILM—Industrial Light & Magic.)

AUTHOR VOICE-OVER: It is only then that I realize it was Lou Fine.

The cameras begin to roll for the next interview scene: "So you made the letterers an integral part of your storytelling package?" "A major comic book house with a bloated bullpen tends to be an assembly line," Eisner nods. "But I made big demands on my letterers. I worked with them, made them part of the storytelling itself. They liked the idea. Nothing really good is done without enthusiasm. All I needed to know was whether they cared. The letterers were people I would not hire unless I knew they were philosophically connected to what I was doing. So there was no question about it. To begin with, these are guys who came into the shop because they wanted to be part of the creative process and wouldn't be there unless they did."

There was no question who had final cut at Tudor City: "In my case, it was a Will Eisner studio, and everything coming out of my shop was material I had to take responsibility for and be identified with. Consequently, the artists who worked for me had to be people I would be willing to be identified with, who identified themselves with me.

"In the earliest Spirit days I did all the writing, penciling and inking—everything but the lettering. Later on, as I got busier and more involved with other things, I would do the penciling and have the bodies inked. But the heads were always done by me and the writing essentially was done by me. I also handled the creation of characters outside of The Spirit. Take Blackhawk, for example, now owned by DC Comics… I created it in-shop, usually a rough drawing or blue-pencil, and then would turn it over to somebody in the shop. After Dave Berg took over Blackhawk we hired freelancer Dick French to script it. After Berg left, Chuck Cuderra took over drawing it. In that particular book, the writing was always freelanced."

I interrupt to ask Eisner about one of the greatest Blackhawk artists ever.

"I didn't have much to do with Reed Crandall. He came in the shop toward the end of my Eisner & Iger tenure and worked there for a while, then I went on, so we didn't have much interaction."

Dave Berg recalls the Crandall tragedy: "Reed had money coming to him. But Caines was very good about that, he paid royalties. Now to locate him. Well he had to hire detectives to find him so he could pay him. And he said when they found him he was in very bad condition. But he gave him the money. Crandall was so talented."

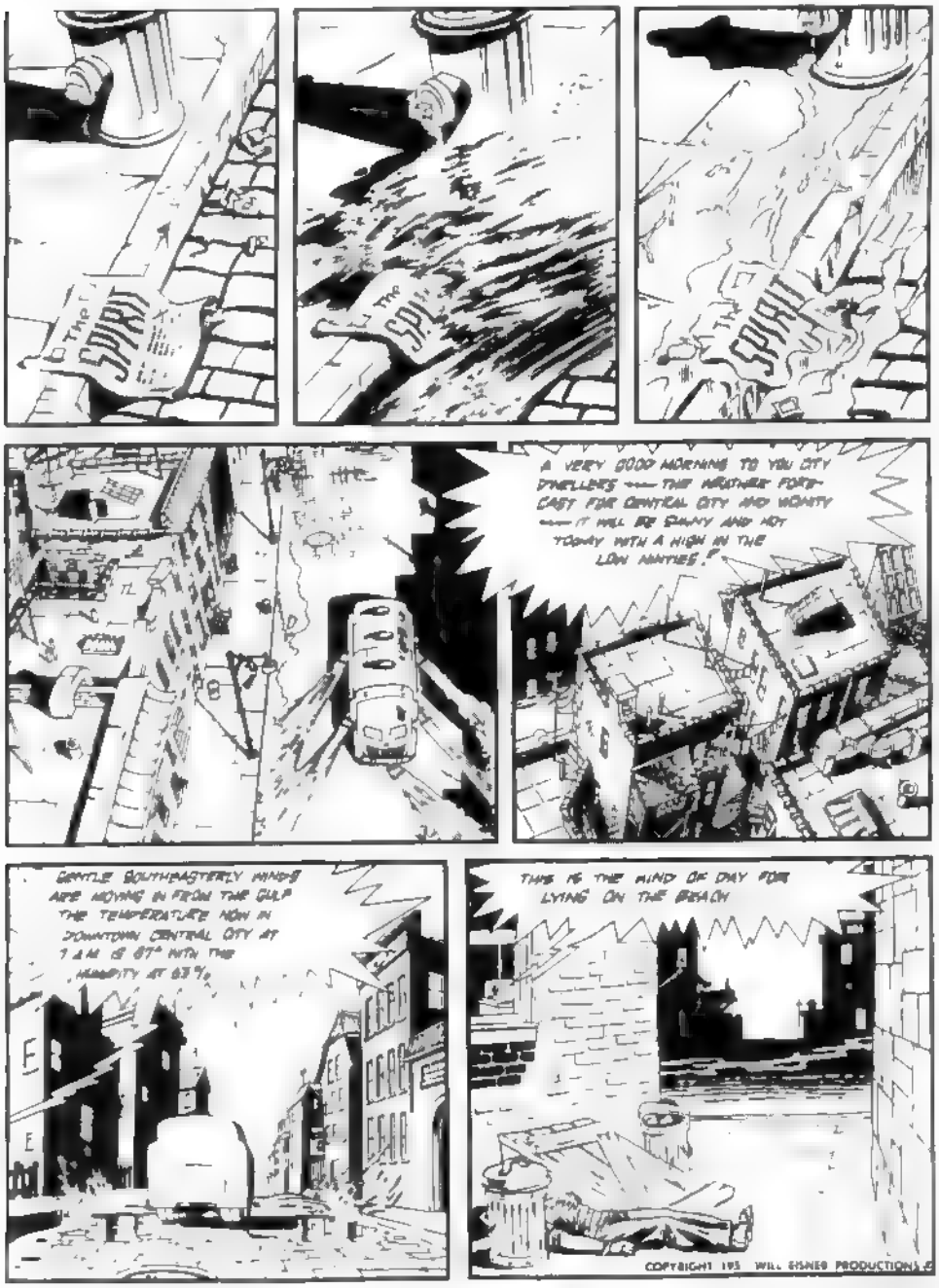
"Pretty soon," Tex recalls, "Will hired Charley Cuderra to do Blackhawk. We didn't call him Charley, we called him Chuck. But he preferred 'Chops'. Don't ask me why. So when we created Blackhawk as a committee in the office in 1941 with everybody contributing something, there was a Chinese character swiped dead from *Terry and the Pirates*, and Chop-Chop was his name. And Charley… Chuck… Chops… wanted him in there as one of the characters. And Bob Powell created one of the other characters, and so on."

SEGUE SEQUENCE: The lights dim down. Rain thunders through the studio. The background morphs into a starry sky with the Blackhawk plane high over head.

Everyone at the Tudor City studio felt the influence of Eisner's noir-flavored work. This Bob Powell page is suffused with it.

Way back in the Eisner & Iger days,' Will goes on, "I created Sheena, Queen of the Jungle by making the first drawing. I actually drew and executed the first cover, but the story was turned over to Mort Meskin. That's generally the way I created characters at Tudor City too. In the case of Lou Fine who preferred not to do any writing, I worked up a thumbnail of a character then orchestrated the scripting before Lou took over. You have to keep in mind that the character of the studio in those days was much akin to a woodworking shop system, with the master designer omnipresent. If a problem arose on a page they were working on, we would talk it over or I would come by and say 'Gee, this doesn't read right, why don't you do it another way.' There was a lot of control on my part because, again, I felt responsible for, and would be *identified with* whatever came out of the shop. But there was plenty of informal training involved. Lou Fine might be doing something and I'd come over and say--'Well maybe you oughtta draw older-looking shoes.' The advantage I had in a shop like that was that my entire staff were salaried. I was not buying freelance- a device I instituted when I started Eisner & Iger on the theory that it would give me total product control. Because then I could say to the artist 'Well, look, I don't like this, do it over, do it another way.' He would be willing to do it because his salary was fixed, unlike a freelancer who loses money if he has to change a page." The artists had the opportunity to work overtime for bonuses as well. 'It was practical but risky because it made production iffy. If you were looking to get four pages from an artist out in a given week and you asked him to change two or three, he might not make deadline! But we had robust morale, the shop was tightly structured, everybody had a great deal of respect for each other, no animosity. As a matter of fact there was a lot of colleagual family warmth there.

Written by Jules Feiffer, this July 15, 1951 Spirit strip represents the last one Will actually drew.



Berg concurs. "We often did things together on Saturdays. I remember one time we all drove up to Yale to watch a football game."

I asked Berg if he had any representative photos. "In those days who was messing with photography? I wasn't, or anybody else."

Eisner continues. 'The guys would go out to dinner together, they socialized. A good, warm shop.'

But the staple interaction were the marathon cross-studio conversations with the War always in the background like the sucking rumble of a giant wave building. "All very interesting," Berg remembers, "Very intelligent, very talented, with conversation going on all day on a very high level, very *intelligent* conversation. We would go on talking at our drawing tables. Of course the war would be the biggest subject, what was developing in Europe. We still weren't in it, but then it did happen while we were at Tudor City and then of course suddenly we were in it and the whole bit. The writing was usually done at night (I did my writing the night before) so the conversation could continue uninterrupted. Those long discussions are why I say I've never been with another group like it."

Kubert recalls a shop-wide work ethic. "The impression I have today is that then

was a professional attitude, not a lot of kidding around. We got our work done, first and primary. But I remember vividly being able to play handball with Tex downstairs during lunch break, so it wasn't all that rigid. But when we were up there working, we were working.

Tex recalls it as more lighthearted. "We just babbled and made silly jokes and sang the good old songs—typical cartoonist studio, nothing sensible gets done."

"The thing that hung over like a dark cloud," Jaffee feels, "was the looming draft and the war. That was kind of affecting most of us. I think we were all very eager to get our careers going, knowing that we're going to get caught up in the war fever."

"I got there in October," Kotzky recalls, "and then Pearl Harbor came along, so most of the conversation was devoted to how we would beat the Japanese in six months! It didn't quite happen that way but there was a lot of kidding around and joking with one another."

"One of the things that made it work," Eisner feels—"was that I was a player-manager, like in baseball, out there on the field working with them, fellow worker as well as shop owner. It wasn't as though I were a boss sitting in the front office way at the end of the hall, remote. If a problem came up I could sit down at the guy's board and demonstrate exactly what I was talking about with my own drawing. We respected each other. I enjoyed their regard professionally and they enjoyed my regard."

"There was a kind of EC spirit, except my guys were working in-shop. In the case of EC or *MAD*, the artists were all freelancers by then, coming into the shop only to drop off their work, whereas in my shop the work was created while the artists were there, between nine and five every day. Working in the shop, they didn't have the kind of separation as individuals freelancers had—an atmosphere distinct from our team feeling. Everybody I ever knew working in the comic business were in it because it became something he'd rather do than anything else. When they started in my shop in the early Eisner & Iger days, the artists regarded the comic field as only a stopover. I was the only one around who regarded it as a lifetime occupation. (Berg will protest I had the same idea. Although I did a lot of the adventure stuff, I wanted to be in comics to do 'life stuff' too.") Most of them aspired to the world of illustration, their primary aim. Lou Fine was always dreaming of being an illustrator, and later became one. Chuck Mazoujian went into advertising, illustration—he's a member of The Society Of Illustrators now, a portrait painter and a very good one.

"We were all just kids when we started this thing," Joe Simon explains, "It was one of the very few places we could go. Sure, we'd rather have been illustrators, or advertising artists, but when you're twenty years old you're not going to step into a magazine. But you could probably do it in comics. Will was nineteen when he started and had Eisner-Iger by the time he turned twenty!"

"The business was so lively and exciting," Al Jaffee enthuses, "you know, *that was the Golden Age*. And so many top-notch people who could have been illustrators for the *Saturday Evening Post* couldn't get work and went into the comics just to pay the rent. If Norman Rockwell was a young guy at that time he'd be doing comic books! You got fantastic people. I mean Lou Fine was an illustrator of top magnitude—and there he was doing comic books!"

> Will Eisner is a rarity—a titan of creativity merged with a master of practicality! And, most unusual of all, he's a helluva nice guy! To paraphrase a famous quote (which is easier than writing an original one) I can only say if there were no Will Eisner, we'd have had to invent one.
>
> **— STAN LEE TO PETER DePREE, JUNE 17, 1996**

Eisner reflects on the stable's interaction: "Even though I couldn't socialize fully with my artists (I was their age, sure, but I was the shop owner) there was, nevertheless, a good friendly relationship. They would bring their dames up. I remember Chuck Mazoujian brought his wife-to-be up and we had dinner together one evening. The Tudor City studio was used for what we called "illicit purposes"! Remember, we were all bachelors then—the key was available! "I don't remember any difficult times, any anger or professional distance between us. There was always a good deal of respect we enjoyed between us."

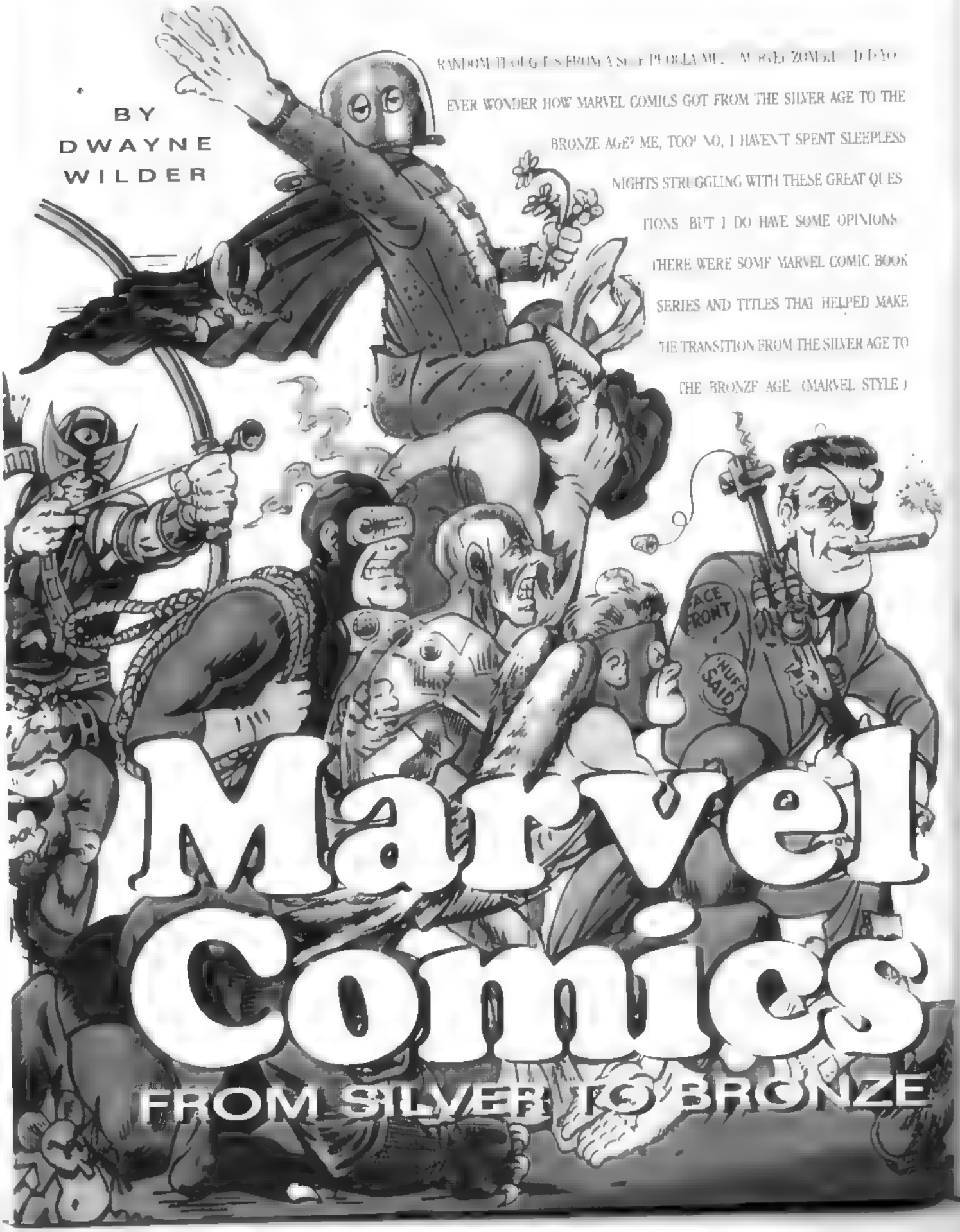
EPISODE WRAP: When I found Will for the next shoot he was standing in the Tokyo Rose bar location shot, arms outstretched, being measured for a zoot. P'Gell sat across from Eisner reading her portion of the script, in a froth over not having enough lines. I caught a hint of Coco Chanel and Nile green eyes. I pulled my eyes away from her creamy ivory décolletage to the bartender working a silverplate Graf Zeppelin cocktail shaker, and back again. ■ **End Part I**

Credited with creating the first 'graphic novel,' each of Will's award-winning book-length comic dramas are today eagerly awaited not just by fandom but by his fellow writers, artists and film directors.

THE END OF THE BEGINNING

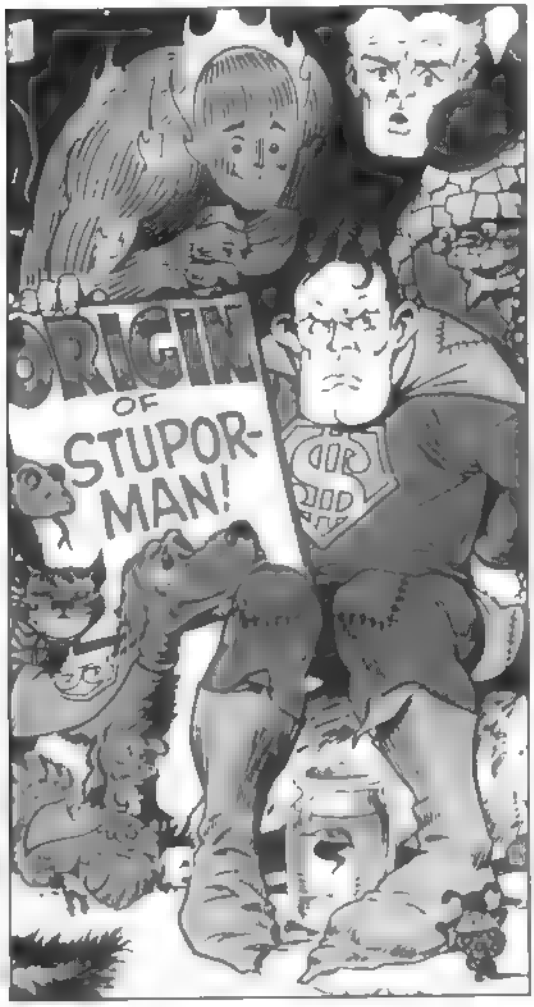
BY DWAYNE WILDER

RANDOM THOUGHTS FROM A SELF PROCLAIMED MARVEL ZOMBIE. DID YOU EVER WONDER HOW MARVEL COMICS GOT FROM THE SILVER AGE TO THE BRONZE AGE? ME, TOO! NO, I HAVEN'T SPENT SLEEPLESS NIGHTS STRUGGLING WITH THESE GREAT QUESTIONS. BUT I DO HAVE SOME OPINIONS. THERE WERE SOME MARVEL COMIC BOOK SERIES AND TITLES THAT HELPED MAKE THE TRANSITION FROM THE SILVER AGE TO THE BRONZE AGE. (MARVEL STYLE.)



Marvel Comics

FROM SILVER TO BRONZE



This is mostly one man's opinion, so don't get in a tizzy if I depart from the Marvel "party-line" history here and there. As someone who got these books/titles a little after the fact, I believe I have a unique perspective. I got to read them knowing their "historical" context instead of reading them the month they were published.

And these examples are not all that helped make the "Marvel transition." There are others which could be discussed later. (What do you say, Gary?)

Not Brand Echh!

So, to begin, *Not Brand Echh!* was the humor title Marvel did to lampoon itself. It was a great idea and is still funny today! The 13 issue run wasn't very long, but issues #9-13 were "king size." So there was plenty to laugh at.

The series started in August 1967 and continued into late 1968. This was long enough after 1961 to give Marvel readers a "shared" history of the Marvel Universe. Therefore, the slapstick and satire was funnier. (Basic rule of comedy is that you can't make fun of something your audience doesn't understand!) This could be considered a first step to a new age. As an entity, you are established and strong enough to make fun of yourself. That's an important point. And boy, did the Marvel "Bullpen" do a number on their universe. In issue one, for example, Marvel unleashed Forbush Man. (A comic rendition of an inside joke already being used in the "Bullpen" pages of Marvel comic books.)

Some more examples of the parodies (you'll know the originals): The Silver Burper, Dr. Bloom, Sgt. Furious, Ironed Man, Spidey Man, Charlie America, The Mighty Sore, Echhs-Men, Unhumans, Dr. Deranged, and The Fantastica. Four. Marvel also took another look at some classic battles/events: The Coming of the Silver Burper, Sunk-Mariner vs. the Human Scortch, Knock Furious vs. Blunder Agents and the wedding of the Human Scortch and Crystal. So, nothing was sacred! Marvel even took on some of DC's classic characters: the origin of Stupor Man and Gnatman & Rotten are examples.

Some more classic battles were Scaredevil (The Man who's scared of fear!) vs. Evil Electrico, Megneato vs. Echhs-Men, The Thung vs. the Bulk and the Flighty Revengers vs. Dang the Conqueror. (Was this the prelude to "The Clunking"?)

Marvel, not to be outdone, did an all origin issue (*NBE* #7). Of course, they had to do the beginning of the Fantastica. Four. My favorite was "Shrew Storm, the Inevitable Girl." After the incredible space journey, Bim Grimm, The Thung, says, "Hey, now we're a cinch to be on the Ed Sullivan Show." Another comical "touch" is when they all put their hands together for their classic pledge, Sonny Storm, the Human Scortch, forgets to "flame off"!

The origin of Stupor-Man was full of classic references. Ma Kettle, talking about her son, "Klunk is a good boy; not like that naughty Peter Pooper!" The "glasses" disguise, of course, was duly noted. The phone booth business, Stupor-Dog, Stupor-Girl and jabs at DC (i.e. Devilishly Correct) were other references.

Finally, issue #11 featured "King Konk"—Greatest Monster Movie of all time (with plenty of Marvel Stupor Heroes in the story!). The Marvel "Bullpen" also did a Steranko Nick Fury story "The Puns of Wilt Bonnet", Auntie May's Nursery Rhymes and from literature . . . "Ivanshmoe."

Iron Man/Sub-Mariner #1

By 1968, Marvel had some clout, selling some 50 million copies annually. This allowed Marvel to rearrange its distribution deal with DC so they could publish more titles. In early 1968, Marvel published a "Special Once in a lifetime issue" *Iron*

Man/Sub-Mariner #1. It is part of the transition to the Bronze Age because of its historical significance.

This Marvel key issue is the result of Marvel's publishing expansion in 1968. The companion titles (*Tales to Astonish*, *Tales of Suspense*, and *Strange Tales*) were to be split and all characters given their own titles. Even the original 18 issue Silver Surfer series started during this growth period.

A quick recap is in order. *TTA* has the Hulk and the Sub-Mariner, *TOS* had Captain America and Iron Man, and *Strange Tales* had Nick Fury and Doctor Strange. The decision was for the Hulk, Captain America, Nick Fury, and Dr. Strange to have their own books. This left Iron Man and Sub-Mariner without a home.

Marvel decided to do one companion book with these two characters. They called it simply, *Iron Man and Sub-Mariner*. This title was a "bridge" book between the end of *TOS* and *TTA* and each character's own title. There was a gap in production and *IM/SM* #1 filled it with a one-issue title. It is a key because the stories in *IM/SM* #1 were continuations from *TOS* #99 and *TTA* #101. Those stories concluded in the respective character titles that followed in February 1968: *Iron Man* #1 and *Sub-Mariner* #1. Marvel now had full expansion with all characters in their own titles. In my view, this officially ended the Marvel Silver Age of companion titles.

The concept of publishing expansion was a huge step. Marvel physically moved from one publishing type to another. In the Bronze Age, the characters had their own books. This change helped set the stage for the popularity of the '70's Marvel superhero.

One final note, after this expansion, Archie Goodwin, owner of the company sold Marvel and the industry experienced a slump in 1969. This forced Marvel to cancel titles instead of starting new ones. Of course, this decline signaled the end of an era. When Jack Kirby left Marvel for DC Comics, the Marvel Silver Age was officially over.

The Drug Issues

Spider-Man #96-98 are the so-called "drug issues". They were not Comic Code approved. Very few (if any) Marvel Silver Age comics have this distinction. As a company, Marvel, pushing the industry standards, was making a transition. The story was tame by today's standards (25 years later). But it was a milestone because a regular Marvel superhero title was not Code approved.

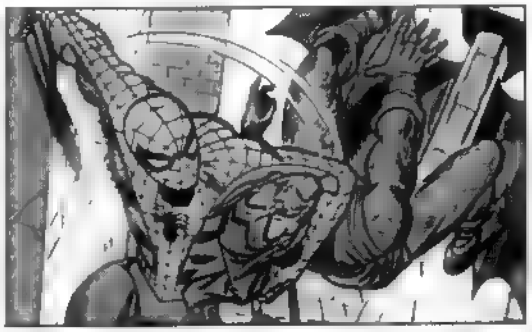
Marvel had evolved enough to do social commentary within its own stories. The story itself was very good. Stan Lee wove an intricate story showing the negative effects of drug use while giving readers that amazing Spider-Man action.

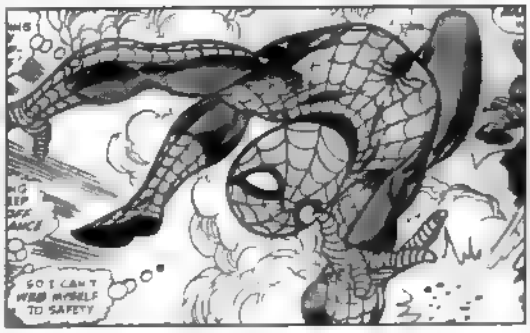
Peter Parker confronts Norman Osborn (The Green Goblin) in his Osborn Industries office. After a cryptic meeting, Spidey saves a "hi" drug addict falling from a building ledge. The junkie "thinks" he can fly. The first chapter of the story ends with Norman Osborn reclaiming his Green Goblin identity. (He had lost his memory of it.)

In issue #97, the battle ensues for seven pages. The Goblin retreats and Peter Parker worries about killing his best friend's father. (Roommate Harry is Norman's son.)

Harry, with problems of his own, is shown buying drugs and using drugs. His behavior is affected and the story shows how he reacts to different situations while "on a trip". Peter Parker finds him passed out just as the Green Goblin attacks.

In the last chapter, issue #98, Peter Parker tries to help Harry as the Green Goblin is shocked by the sight of his unconscious son. He flees. Peter gets Harry to the hospital and on the way home, meets the drug dealer who sold Harry the pills. Peter pulls punches but beats the pusher and his cohorts. The Green Goblin attacks once more.





Spidey maneuvers him to fight near the hospital. He tricks the Green Goblin to stop next to Harry's window. The shock is so great that the Green Goblin reverts back to normal Norman Osborn. Spider-Man burns the Goblin costume and gets Norman Osborn home. Harry begins his recovery.

One note: The story foreshadowed Harry's incarnation as the Green Goblin. His past drug use made him susceptible to the Green Goblin formula. I consider this excellent writing.

In my opinion, when a company has developed enough to do social commentary or topical current issues, it is ready to evolve to the next level. Of course, this wouldn't happen in one day! But the beginning of the Marvel Bronze Age had started. (And this was not necessarily a bad thing!)

Avengers #100

Avengers #100 was a landmark book due to its concept. Marvel decided as an anniversary, the Avengers should have a reunion! This in itself tells me that Marvel had progressed a long way. How and why would you do such a story unless you had the history to back it up?

One hundred issues is approximately eight and one half years on a monthly title. The history amassed and storyline continuity is formidable after eight and one half years. Since the Avengers were one of the first creations of the Marvel Silver Age, it can be considered atypical of all titles. When a company does such a retrospective, it can be considered a tribute to the past. This can signal a new beginning or a new age maybe?

Also, a "hot", popular artist, Barry Smith, did the cover and story art. Discovering and using such a creative person also signals the new instead of dwelling on the old. I believe by *Avengers* #100, Marvel was in a new mindset. Maybe not so much consciously, but a change had occurred.

Of course, Barry Smith had "come of age" with Conan #1 two years earlier. (His first Marvel work was *X-Men* #53.) To a lesser degree, Neal Adams' work on *Avengers* #93 was another signal to a new age. (He was another "hot" artist at the time.)

Also *The Avengers* were Marvel's third Silver Age title to make it to 100 issues. (I'm only counting an original series; not continuations of a fantasy title, e. g. *Journey into Mystery*.) As more titles pass this mark, the entire body of work evolves to a new age. By number three, a new Marvel identity was created.

The story was written by Roy Thomas (Avengers writer since issue #35.) It featured every character who had been an Avenger (even the Swordsman). They all battle the Olympian gods, Ares, and the Enchantress to save Olympus. Thor and Hercules complete the battle by closing off the portal to earth. All is well for the victorious Assembled Avengers.

Silver To Bronze

These four examples give some idea of how Marvel moved from Silver to Bronze Age. There are others such as the Sword and Sorcery titles. If you are a "Marve, Zombie" I am sure you can think of others.

The transition was complete by *Avengers* #100. Other milestone issues occurred such as *Spider-Man* #129 (first Punisher), *Hulk* #181 (first Wolverine) and *X-Men* #94 (all new X-Men). These put their mark on the Bronze Age and started a new trend.

So, in my humble opinion, that is how Marvel Comics evolved in the new Age. Thanks for reading… and write in with your thoughts on Marvel's transition to the Bronze Age. *CBM* would like to know what you think. ■

JOINING FORCES

THE BRAVE & BOLD TEAM-UPS!

BY JAMES CANGIALOSI

Comic heroes have been joining forces since the Golden Age of comics. In titles such as *All Star Comics*, *All Winners Comics*, *Leading Comics*, *All-Select Comics*, and *Young Allies*, costumed characters shared covers and stories much to the delight of readers and fans. Teams like The Justice Society of America, The Seven Soldiers of Victory, and The All Winners Squad are some of the earliest and best examples of these team-ups.

On occasion, even villains would team-up to battle their heroic counterparts. One of the more acclaimed instances is the highly collectible *All Star Comics* #37. In that historic issue, the Wizard, Brainwave, the Gambler, Vandal Savage, the Thinker, and Degaton became the villainous Injustice Society of the World... a perfect "anti-hero" balance against the might of the JSA.

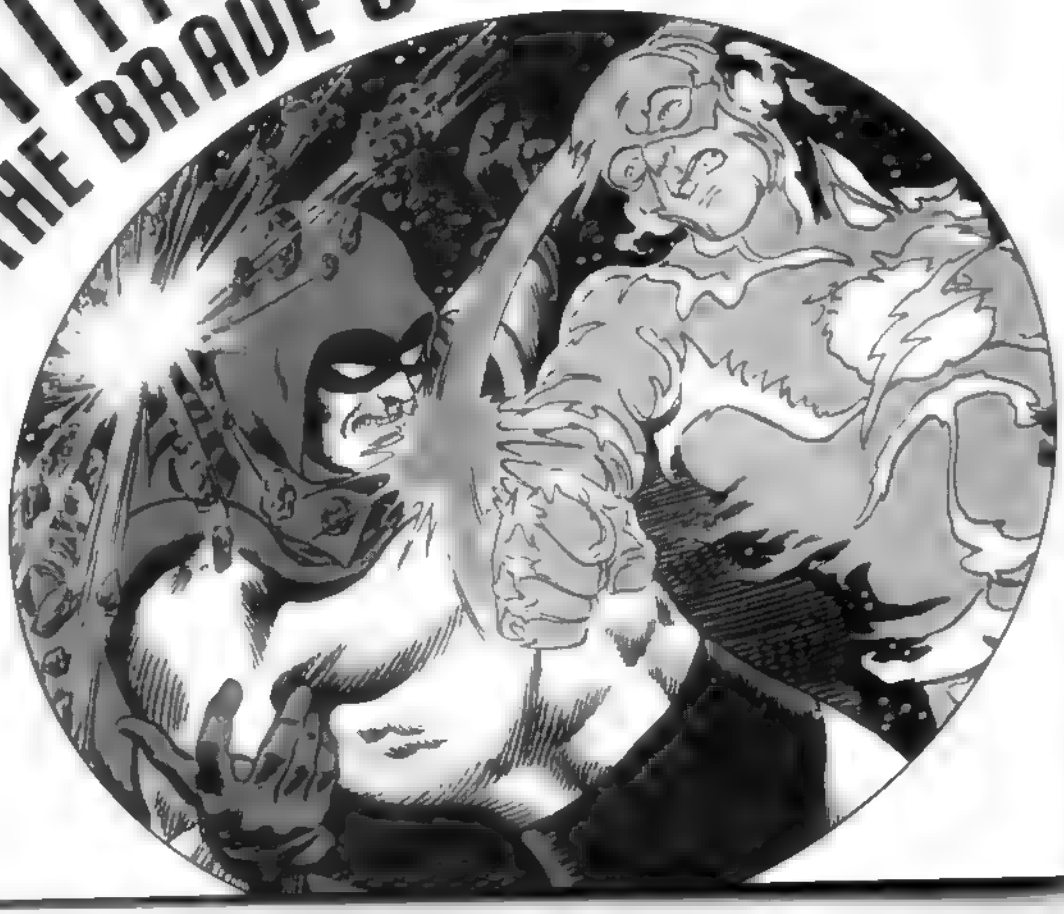
As good as multiple hero gatherings were, some of the most enjoyable and memorable team-ups featured only two heroes... uniting for a single and often exceptional adventure.

Golden Age examples of these two-hero team-ups are somewhat rare, but they did occasionally take place, like the famous first Batman/Superman team-up in the highly collectible *Superman* #76.

And topping the Golden Age roster is one of the more historic duos of comic history... the Human Torch and Sub-Mariner! They met both as allies and enemies in various Timely comics.

SILVER TEAMS

Even though the memorable Golden Age team-ups and crossovers are highly sought after, Silver Age team-ups seem to dominate in the memories of most



collectors. An army of babyboomer fans cut their teeth on Silver Age superhero teams. The Justice League of America, The Avengers, The Teen Titans, The Fantastic Four, and The X-Men were all popular multi-character features.

Then in 1963 the concept of the team-up and crossover would take a dramatic leap forward at both Marvel and DC Comics. In *Amazing Spider-Man* #1 the Fantastic Four made their first crossover in a Marvel comic, and in *Fantastic Four* #12 the Hulk made his first Marvel crossover. What made *Amazing Spider-Man* #1 and *Fantastic Four* #12 even more important is that they were both tied together creating the first full Marvel crossover of the Silver Age.

After this historic first meeting of Marvel characters, the flood gates were opened. Marvel headliners began regular appearances in each others titles … and even the company's Golden Age stars made historic re-appearances, teaming up with the "new" generation of heroes. These Marvel milestones helped to make the sixties a roller coaster ride of reading and collecting excitement.

Not to be outdone, DC decided to offer a new venue for its characters. Towards the end of 1963 they gave fans a format that is still copied today!

DC began their early experiments with Silver Age team-ups well before 1963. In 1954 Batman and Superman would begin to appear together as a team in *World's Finest* #71. In 1962 the Justice League of America teamed up with Adam Strange in the classic *Mystery In Space* #75 … a "sequel" to *JLA* #3.

GREEN ARROW & J'ONN J'ONZZ

But it would be DC's *Brave & Bold* #50 (October/November 1963), that would change the title into a format that focused on two-hero team-ups. That important and often overlooked Silver Age gem displayed the caption "Two Great Heroes Teamed in a Book Length Blockbuster" … and started a whole new look for DC. The 50th issue featured the first historic team-up and starred Green Arrow and J'onn J'onzz, the Manhunter from Mars … two characters that were mainly "back-up" features in DC anthology titles. That first story was entitled "Wanted – The Capsule Master!"

The issue is noteworthy not only because of its choice of stars, but because it is the first Manhunter From Mars crossover outside of *Detective Comics* and *Justice League of America*. *B&B* #50 also pre-dates the Manhunter's first appearance in *House Of Mystery* #143.

The memorable cover, depicting Green Arrow attacking the Manhunter with fire arrows as a mysterious villain looks on, is one of those that excited young readers to a fever pitch in pre-release ads. In spite of all the landmark "firsts" that the previous seven years of the Silver Age had introduced … this one seemed "new" and novel to the legion of DC fans. Predicting which characters would be teamed up was like some super-lottery and it was played in backyards and playgrounds full of excited kids all across the country. The DC editors stoked this fire by asking everyone to write in and suggest possible team combinations.

The story in *Brave & Bold* #50 begins with Green Arrow and his sidekick Speedy investigating a prison break and a mysterious theft. After examining a sketch of the assailants, Green Arrow deduces that his quarry is a gang of Martian thugs, and because of their alien backgrounds who better to assist him in the case than his Justice League teammate the Martian Manhunter. After discussing the strange happenings, the heroes encounter the gang and go into battle against them. The trio is unsuccessful in stopping them, but they do learn that the name of the mastermind behind the trouble is a Martian criminal named Vulkor. After learning this, the Manhunter travels back to his homeworld, Mars, to learn more about this criminal, and hopefully find a way to stop him. While on Mars, the Manhunter learns from the planet's council that Vulkor was at one point in possession of an all-powerful weapon that was seemingly destroyed during a fight he had with Martian authorities. Content with what he learns, the Manhunter begins his journey back to earth, unaware of what is awaiting him.

As the Manhunter makes his way back to Earth, Green Arrow and Speedy head into battle once again against Vulkor. Unable to stop him, Green Arrow is captured by the criminal just as the Manhunter returns to the fray. Believing Green Arrow to be in Vulkor's clutches, Speedy and the Manhunter try to figure out how to rescue their friend.

Suddenly appearing from nowhere is Green Arrow, saying that he had escaped from the aliens.

After examining Vulkor's robberies, the Martian Manhunter realizes that the all powerful weapon that Vulkor had on Mars wasn't destroyed

THE EMERALD ADVENTURERS clash as Green Arrow falls prey to alien mind-control in this first Brave & Bold (#50, Oct/Nov 1963) team-up issue.

THE SMALLEST HERO teamed with the fastest hero to cope with "The Challenge of the Expanding World". (#53, Apr/May 1964)

Instead it was dismantled and hidden by the criminal, and now Vulkor is trying to retrieve the pieces and put the weapon together again. Realizing the sudden urgency of the situation the heroes set out to again capture the criminal. They successfully track Vulkor down, and just as the Martian Manhunter is ready to capture the criminal, Green Arrow suddenly turns on his ally and begins firing fire arrows at him. Any fan of DC Silver Age comics immediately knew that Green Arrow was shooting fire arrows, because fire is the one weakness to Martians.

Pleased with what he is seeing, Vulkor takes the opportunity to escape, and leaves the heroes bewildered as to what happened to Green Arrow. Later it is revealed that the bowman was being controlled by a device called a brainwave energizer, which was placed in the handle of his bow. Only by changing identities and catching Vulkor and his Martian cohorts by surprise were the heroes successful in stopping them and bringing the villains to justice. This story was a fun, action-packed, and thrill-a-minute. After reading this issue, fans wanted more team-ups between their favorite characters. Luckily for them they didn't have to look any further then the next issue.

THE HERO OF THE SEA TEAMS with the hero of the air to battle a mysterious monster that is part fish and part bird (#51, Dec/Jan 1963/64).

AQUAMAN & HAWKMAN

The cover to *Brave & Bold* #51 (December 1963/January 1964) bears the caption "Two Famed Fighters Join Forces to Combat a Mighty Menace from the Sea and Sky!", and with that the team-up of Aquaman and Hawkman had begun. Along with their partners Aqualad and Hawkgirl these heroes set out to save the earth from a strange and unusual creature, part bird and part fish. This issue of *Brave & Bold* pre-dates the publication of *Hawkman* #1, and gives fans an extra helping of the winged warrior and a taste of what to expect in his title. The cover to this issue set the pace for the story and gives a great illustration of Hawkman diving to the rescue of Aquaman, who is being assaulted by the creature.

As "Fury of the Exiled Creature" begins, fans see Aquaman trying to protect the city of Atlantis which is under attack by a narwhal. Through the course of his battle with the creature Aquaman finds out that his telepathic powers have been lost. For one brief moment Aquaman had lost his control of the sea creatures. While Aquaman is left puzzled as to his power loss, in Midway City, Hawkman is contacted by an intelligent giant condor known as Lokir. It was this creature's duty to guard a device known as the Pipe of Quixtoa, which would give anyone who possessed it control over all birds. Unfortunately the pipe was taken away by the creature that was part bird and part fish. Being the true hero, Hawkman took it upon himself to locate the creature and regain the pipe.

As Hawkman and Hawkgirl set out on their mission, Aquaman journeys to see the Old Man of the Oceans in the hope of finding an answer to his problems. Upon finding the aly wise and mysterious being, Aquaman is warned by him to beware of the Outcast of Atlantis. Aquaman deduces that the wise-being is referring to an Atlantean known as Tyros who had been banished from Atlantis for trying to become dictator. Besides Aquaman, Tyros was the only other Atlantean who had the ability to control sea creatures. Eventually Aquaman and Aqualad meet up with Hawkman and Hawkgirl in a battle against the giant winged creature. This creature was actually Tyros who had been transformed into this monster by a strange and powerful gem, and because he had his telepathic powers and the magic pipe he was now ruler of the animals of the sea and sky. During the course of the battle Tyros captures Hawkgirl, and uses the gem to transform her into a harpy. Tyros then gives the Hawk harpy the pipe so that she can control the birds, while he assumes the throne of Atlantis. The heroes had lost the first battle, and had lost badly.

While Aquaman is recovering from his injuries, Hawkman tries to find a way to help his wife. Hawkman comes up with an ingenious solution that involves an alien egg. He uses his Thanagarian technology to hatch a Thanagarian Mytrus bird's egg. When this gigantic bird emerges it is pitted against the Hawk-harpy in battle and defeats the mutated heroine. The magical pipe that Hawkgirl was using to control the skies had no effect on the bird, because it was not indigenous to earth. While Hawkman was rescuing Hawkgirl, Aquaman was able to locate the mystical gem and destroy it. By doing this, Tyros and Hawkgirl return to normal, and the villain lay in defeat again. You just don't find classic stories like this any more.

FLASH & ATOM

The Flash, the Fastest Man Alive, and The Atom, the Smallest Man Alive teamed-up in a story called "The Challenge of the Expanding World!" published in *Brave & Bold* #53 (April/May 1964) and beautifully illustrated by Alex Toth. This is one of the most enjoyable team-ups of the series beginning with the great cover that has the Flash and Atom trying to out-run the expanding green world as spaceships fire at them. I love the renditions of the Flash and Atom in this issue, as well as the surroundings they are in. Alex Toth has always been able to add a certain brilliance to the characters and stories he draws, and this issue

is one of his finest works in the Silver Age.

The story begins with the Flash investigating some strange happenings which include giant statues coming to life, and giant plants attacking a bridge. While the Flash is battling these strange occurrences the Atom is enlisted by a scientist to help investigate a mysterious green orb he had discovered. After he examined the orb the scientist found that one of its atoms was missing an electron, so he requested the Atom to reduce to electron size and act as a replacement component for the atom so that a proper analysis of the orb could be conducted. Just as the Atom is preparing for the journey, the Flash arrives at the scientist's lab after following a molecular vibration trail connected to the strange phenomena. He is surprised to find the Atom there. The scientist then enlists the Flash's help to propel the Atom to the necessary location in the orb. With the Flash's help the Atom is launched into the sub-atomic world. Although his mission is a failure because he can't hold orbit around the atom, the Mighty Mite becomes entangled in an unexpected adventure. The Atom within the sub-atomic world, finds a shrunken planet that has a thriving advanced civilization.

The Atom learns from some of its inhabitants that the world had been shrunk because it was going to be destroyed by an exploding star. After the orb landed on earth, the planet's dictator, Atlia-5, decided that the time had come to return the planet to normal size, and allow it to take up the space where the earth existed. The technology of this civilization allowed the inhabitants to take over the mind of the scientist who found the planet and use him in their effort to return to normal. While the Atom was learning more about the planet he felt it beginning to enlarge. As the Atom notices the change from within the sphere, the Flash sees the green orb growing larger and larger on the earth. He uses his awesome speed to travel fast enough so that he can vibrate through the protective green shell and see what is on the other side. Landing on the planet, the Flash is quickly subdued by the dictator's army. Only with the Atom's help does the Flash escape, and get both of them away from the expanding world. Once they escape the planet, the Atom use his scientific knowledge to stop the planet from expanding and returns it to its shrunken size. This near disastrous event causes the planet's citizens to take control away from Atlia-5, and give it to a better leader. Deciding that earth is not the proper place to enlarge their world, the new leaders guide the orb back into space and begin a search for someplace where they can live in peace.

EVEN THE MIGHTY SPECTAL, in his fourth Silver Age appearance, has trouble mastering a cosmically-enhanced Flash, as seen in two panels from #72 (Jun/Jul 1967).

ROBIN, AQUALAD, & KID FLASH

It is the teen sidekick's turn to take center stage in *Brave & Bold* #54 (June/July 1964). In this story Robin, Aqualad, and Kid Flash take on the evil Mr. Twister in an adventure called, "The Thousand and One Dooms of Mr. Twister!" In the annals of comic history this story is significant, because it marks the first appearance of the Teen Titans. While they are never actually called the Teen Titans in the story, it is the general consensus that this is the issue where the team begins its lengthy career. The cover to this issue is crammed with action. I'm especially fond of the way Robin is trying to escape the malevolent Mr. Twister and his fire storm, while carrying the unconscious Aqualad and Kid Flash to safety. This team-up issue is made even more special by cameo appearances by Batman, Aquaman, and the Flash. How much more could a fan want for twelve cents?

Reading this story you can really feel the world issues it is trying to deliver to the reader. The story begins with differing opinions between the young and old generations of a small town. This idea of differences among the young and old is nothing new, but it has an impact on the younger readers when they see it in a comic. As the story unfolds Aqualad, Robin, and Kid Flash are invited to the town by its teenage population in order to act as their spokesmen toward the adults

When the heroes arrive, they learn that all the teenagers are missing, and later it is revealed that they are the prisoners of a villain called Mr. Twister.

The story gives a large dose of action and adventure in battles between the heroes and villain, but what makes the story truly compelling are the demands made by Mr. Twister. It is revealed that Mr. Twister's ancestor once owned the land the town was built on, and for renting it to the townspeople he demanded one passenger pigeon feather be given to him every year. After his ancestor died the rent was forgotten by the town, until Mr. Twister arrived and said he wanted all of the back rent of passenger pigeon feathers or else he would take the town's teenagers away for good.

On the surface this may seem like a ridiculous premise, but delve a little deeper. The reason that the town couldn't pay Mr. Twister is because passenger pigeons had long been extinct. The greed and ignorance of generations past had affected the present day people. Any young child who reads this comic gets a clear message about the evils of extinction — the generation gap — and the importance of teamwork and cooperation — all in one issue. That's a pretty impressive agenda for a funny book and a good issue for a new super team to make a start.

FLASH & *JONN JONZZ* find themselves confronted by a creature that combines their looks and their powers in #56 (Nov 1964).

FLASH & J'OHN J'ONZZ

In the "Raid of the Mutant Marauders!" found in issue #56 of *Brave & Bold* (October/November 1964) fans see the Flash and the Manhunter from Mars go into action against a hybrid being that can imitate the appearance and powers of members of the Justice League of America. The cover to this issue is really exciting, with the Flash and Manhunter being attacked by a being emerging from a capsule whose appearance is half-Flash and half-Manhunter. As a bonus, fans have a guest star in the form of Hawkgirl, who plays a prominent role in the adventure.

The story begins on a faraway planet called Argon, where its Queen, Titania, orders her scientists to create a super-hero that has all the powers of the JLA. Once the scientists succeed, the creature goes on an unexpected rampage. The Queen's wrath is swift, and she orders the being to be locked in a capsule and blasted into space. The capsule journeys through space and crashes on Earth where it is mistakenly put on display at a fair as a time capsule. Visiting that fair are the Flash and Martian Manhunter in their civilian guises. While they are enjoying themselves a mysterious being appears which has an appearance part Flash and part Manhunter. The heroes burst into action and try to subdue the creature, but are unsuccessful. Time and again they try to stop the shape-shifting being, but each time they are defeated by the different hybrid form the being takes on. There are some great drawings of this creature appearing as Hawkman and Aquaman, Green Lantern and Flash etc. As the story develops the Manhunter deduces that the capsule originated from the planet Argon, so he travels there to speak with Queen Titania and learns the origin of the hybrid. The hybrid had gone berserk because his heart was broken by the Queen. She had been so disgusted by his true physical appearance that she couldn't stand to look at him.

When Manhunter returns to earth he enlists the aid of Hawkgirl to pose as Queen Titania in the hopes of making the hybrid believe the Queen didn't find him ugly. The ruse is unsuccessful, and just as the hybrid prepares to wreak more havoc, the true Queen arrives. She shoots a ray at the capsule and activates a powerful booby trap. Knowing that the capsule is going to destroy itself the hybrid flies it into deep space, so that the blast would not harm the queen. Even though she found him ugly the hybrid loved her deeply and did not want her to be harmed. He gave his life so that she may live. At the conclusion of the story it is this supposed villain that is the true hero.

DOOM PATROL & FLASH

In *Brave & Bold* #65 (April-May 1966) the misfits of DC Comics, the Doom Patrol, team-up with the Flash in a story called "Alias Negative Man!" The cover to this issue is interesting. It shows Robotman and Elasti-Girl crashing through a wall and the Flash vibrating through a wall, in order to stop Monsieur Mallah who is at a control panel preparing to launch Negative Man, on a missile to an unknown destiny. A small Elasti-Girl is standing on Robotman's shoulder, and is extending a giant hand to stop Mallah. The one thing that is always impressive about the Doom Patrol is how its members, Robotman, Chief, Elasti-Girl, and Negative Man, are trying to overcome self-pity and physical shortcomings. In no small way this team exemplifies the idea that any type of physical handicap is not a reason for a person to give up, but an incentive to fight and strive for equality.

The story in this issue has the DP's enemies, the Brotherhood of Evil, capturing the negative energy being of Negative Man. If the being is outside of N-Man's body for more than sixty seconds he will die, and the Brotherhood knows that. The evil team, made up of General Immortus, Madame Rouge, Garguax, the Brain and Monsieur Mallah hopes that the DP will be unable to defeat them without Negative Man by their side. While the Chief and the rest of the DP are busy saving Negative Man's life, the Brotherhood of Evil sets out on their next insidious plan for world domination.

Once the Chief realizes the Brotherhood's plans he enlists the aid of the Flash to masquerade as Negative Man so that the evil team will think their plan has failed. The evil organization invents a way to send subliminal mess-

ages such as "Destroy, Revolt, Kill" through the skies and create unrest and fear among the people. The heroes eventually locate the Brotherhood, and bring the battle to them. Through teamwork, the Flash and Doom Patrol are able to defeat the Brotherhood and restore peace to a world on the brink of disaster.

FLASH & SPECTRE

In the story called "Phantom Flash, Cosmic Traitor!" fans get to see what would happen when the Flash and Spectre meet not as friends, but as enemies. I know this issue isn't exactly a team-up exemplifying camaraderie, but bear with me. This story takes place in *Brave & Bold* #72 (June/July 1967) and has a fantastic cover by Carmine Infantino and Murphy Anderson. The shot of the Ghostly Guardian toppling into a mountain after being hit by a cosmically enhanced Flash is one of the best looking covers of these issues. The addition of the crashed bi-plane gives this cover an extra dose of intrigue. This issue marks the fourth Silver Age appearance of the Spectre and was published before *Spectre* #1.

The story begins with the Flash being changed into a spectral being by a mysterious bi-plane Ghost Pilot of World War I. This ghost takes control of the Flash and uses him on his mad mission of revenge. The Ghost Pilot sets out to avenge his own death, which he blames on his former comrades during the war. With the Flash's unwilling help, the Ghost captures all of his former comrades, but their disappearances does not go unnoticed. It draws the attention of Jim Corrigan and his alter-ego, the Spectre.

While examining the disappearances, the Spectre uses his magic to see that the culprits behind the abductions are the Ghost Pilot and the Flash. The Spectre sets out to rescue the old pilots and the Flash, and to bring the evil Ghost to justice. After locating his quarry, the Spectre tries to reason with the Ghost Pilot who is unwilling to simply give up and makes a bargain. If the Spectre can defeat the spectral Flash in battle then everyone can go free, but if he loses, the old pilots remain with the Ghost who can do with them as he pleases. The Spectre grudgingly agrees and the battle lines are drawn. There is a terrific battle scene between the Spectre and Flash. Carmine Infantino outdid himself with his drawings in this issue. The battle at first takes shape as a bi-plane dogfight between the two heroes, and ends up in space where the Spectre is able to rescue the Flash from his spectral state. By having the Flash return to normal, he in a sense defeated him, so the Ghost Pilot keeps his word and leaves the old World War I fighters alone and leaves this plane of existence forever. This book may not accurately fall under the category of a team-up, but it does show the lengths to which the Spectre is willing to go to help the Flash. Maybe that is what makes the story so good, the heroic Spectre putting himself at risk to help a fellow hero.

The format of the Brave & Bold team-ups changed DC and comics forever. Metamorpho could meet the Metal Men. Atom could help out Aquaman; and Green Lantern could lend Batman a hand. It was a DC fan's dream come true. The format would change once again in issue #74 when top seller Batman became the permanent half of each team... an approach so successful that it was continued until issue #200! Fans were still guaranteed a different character joining forces with Batman issue after issue.

Some of the greatest DC Comic team-ups of DC's Silver Age characters can be found in these issues of *Brave & Bold*. And for those of us who eagerly waited at the newsstand for each new issue to arrive... the excitement is still there every time one of these great B&B team-ups is spotted in a comic box! ■

THE MARTIAN MANHUNTER and the Scarlet Speedster face an interplanetary invader who can adopt the form and powers of any two JLA members (#56, Oct/Nov 1964).

OTHER GREAT B&B TEAM-UPS

Brave & Bold #55 (Aug/Sep 1964)
Atom with the Metal Men in "Revenge of the Robot Reject!"

Brave & Bold #61 (Aug/Sep 1965)
Starman and Black Canary in "Mastermind of Menaces!"

Brave & Bold #62 (Oct/Nov 1965)
Starman and Black Canary in "Big Super-Hero Hunt!"

Brave & Bold #73 (Aug/Sep 1967)
Atom and Aquaman in "Hail, Galg the Destroyer!"

Brave & Bold #75 (Dec 1966/Jan 1967)
Batman and Spectre in "The Grasp of Shahn-Zi!"

All of these issues can be found for less than $100 in FN condition.

THE MATT SCHIFFMAN REPORT

Some scarce books are still cheap!

Here we find ourselves in the midst of the summer sales, and plenty of prices to report. Sure, we find our hobby having its cold spots here and there, but just when a segment of the hobby is dismissed or ignored, along comes a group of collectors that are more than willing to be a part of it. '50s Westerns? Ace Comics and King Comics? It really wasn't that long ago that these two segments were considered areas of very limited collector interest. One person's bird cage liner is another's pride and joy. Funny thing, that Silver Age era still keeps sticking around and coming forth with some great prices. I've spoken to quite a few Silver collectors that looked on in awe at the Golden Age as it skyrocketed upward, but then remembered that they had experienced that type of growth a few years earlier and it is going to happen again, sooner to the Silver Age than to Golden Age.

I've numerous prices to report this month, so let's get to the data.

Platinum Age

There is definite interest here, but where do collectors go to find these books? Collectors are asking a lot of questions such as, where do we get our information on cover and interior data? Is this just a fad market, or is it going to stay? One thing everyone can agree on... this is scarce material!

Sales: Grimm's Fairy Tales nn 1939 (not in Overstreet) FN $210; Pink Laffin nn VG $110; Little Orphan Annie #6 VF $390; Nippy's Pop nn VG/FN $175

Golden Age

We're all in the hobby because we love it and we didn't stop collecting because prices moved drastically upward. In fact, this bull market brought out many great books that we would have never seen if it wasn't for the perception that the market is willing to handle multiples of guide. Even with the huge increases and multiples of this market, there are still books that are a steal compared to their relative scarcity. Case in point: Headline Comics #1 1943 which lists $240 in NM. When books of this nature show up at auction, the final price in certainly different, but still a great deal and exciting to collect. Even so, there are still books out there that have not come onto the market because their owners perceive the market as still being too low. Ace #11 or Schomburg Airbrush are just two examples of material that fall into this category.

Sales: Exciting #15 FN $200; Kerry Drake (#1) VF $210; Modern Comics #44 FN $185; Our Flag #1 GD $295; Mystery Men #9 FN $350; Captain Flight #7 VG $95; Captain Fearless #1 FN $395; Submariner #2 G $795; Keen Detective Funnies #23 FN $285; Marvel Comics #1 GD- $13,400; Marvel Mystery #3 GD- $750; HYPER Mystery Comics #1 VG $495; Carnival Comics (#13) VF $168; Blackhawk #9 VG+ $795; Amazing Man #22 FN/VF $525; All Select #5 FN $780.00

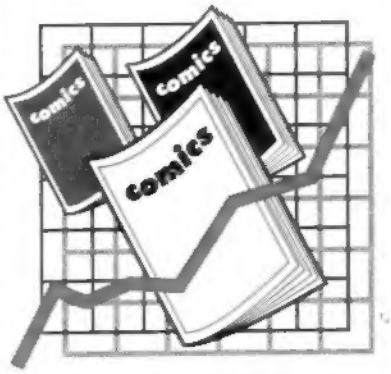
1946 -1956

I think one could say that this era is just plain fun. I've said it before and promise I will say it again, but what other era can give us new discoveries and untold revelations everyday? Its also quite fun to be able to pick up a small group of books for the price of one high end Golden Age book. Matt Baker Good Girl and LB Cole still lead the way, but finding the first or early work by the Silver Age greats is another rewarding pursuit. Prices at multiples of guide is now the norm and understood by most 50s collectors... yet even that is a bargain when finding a 1952 title in NM at $38.00 in guide.

Sales: Exposed #2 FN $95; Everything Happens To Harvey #1 VF $210; Joe Palooka #30 FN $45; My Secret Affair #1 FN $110; Sun Girl #1 VG/FN $495; ZAGO #4 VF/NM $325; The Black Knight #1 G $125; Robin Hood Tales #1 FN $135; Hand Of Fate #24 VF $210; My Desire #32 VF $175; My Desire #3 FN $70;

(continued on page 76)

MARKET REPORTS



GREG PHARIS & DAVE GRISEZ

SAN DIEGO COMIC & COLLECTIBLES

San Diego, California

Salutations and welcome to this month's CBM market report. The local focus has been the buzzing in anticipation of the Comic Con International (which by this time has come and gone). It's always exciting in San Diego comic stores as the Big Show nears! We know everyone wants to know what's happening in our neck of the woods so we'll jump right in with the consignment sale of a Fantastic Four #1 in VG+ condition for $3,000. This book literally came out of a closet in Idaho and because the older couple were told by friends (no jokin' now) "... if you wanna sell those old comics, Jed, you gotta go to Cali-for-nay-ay!"

This book sold in a matter of two (count 'em) two days! Other sales... Tales to Astonish #27 FR $75, #26 VG $30; Strange Tales #89 GD (spine split) $40; Strange Tales #70 VG $40; Adventures of the Jaguar #2 VG+ $25, #8 FN $20. The 1972 Supergirl series #1-6 VF at current Overstreet Guide. Superman #241-248 all VF+ at Guide.

The following 52 pagers all contain excellent Murphy Anderson artwork and are getting tougher to find in high grade (sign of the times!) Detective #101 VF $375, Batman #150 FN $24, #234 VF $50, #255 VF $20;

Also sold... Little Dot #2 FN+ $80; Teen Titans #1 VF- $120. Consignment sales: Planet #60 VG+ $190; Flash #108 VG $65; Phantom Lady #16 VG $575; Torchy #1 GD $100, #3 VG $100; Zoot #10 FN $150.

Out of the comics area but related, we sold a 1954 TV Guide with Walt Disney and friends on the cover (no... no Uncle Scrooge image!) in VF for $65. Thanks for coming by our booth in San Diego, the next time you come to town drop in and say howdy!

(continued from page 74)
Personal Love #27 VF $170; Whack #2 FN/VF $90; Strange Fantasy #13 NM- $285; Sub Mariner #36 VF/NM $750; Out Of This World #4 VF- $125

Silver Age

Does the Silver Age need to be saved? Some say yes, while others say no. Prices reported for this month definitely show that Silver is doing just fine despite the negative press and that a renewed interest by readers for lower pricedlower grade books is growing. The reader that can more easily relate to the Silver Age than the Golden Age is what is driving this market right now, and I think we sometimes forget just how many Silver Age collectors are out there. Prices for high end books are still climbing, and interest in the more scarce Silver Age books is growing. Keep an eye out for higher grade Hulk #1-6, and pre-hero Marvels in fine or better.

Sales: Action #252 FN, $585; Adventures Of Jerry Lewis #102 NM $48; Green Lantern #59 FN $110; Unknown Worlds #1 FN $110; Iron Man #2 NM $100; Konga #1 FN/VF $185; Hawkman #1 G $75; X-Men #1 G $485; Metal Men #1 FN $195; Showcase #4 G- $1,950; #20 NM $1,650; Batman #181 NM $165; Hawk & Dove #1 VF+ $39; Submariner #7 NM $45; Incredible Hulk #1 G $1,100; Life With Archie #1 VF- $350; Hogan's Heroes #1 VF $46; Marvel Tales #2 VF $55; Phantom Stranger #1 NM $85; Star Spangled War Stories #84 FN $75

1970s/Bronze Age

Quite a bit of dealer and collector feedback has shown me that they would love to see a study on 1969-73 print runs for the various titles from DC, Marvel, and Gold Key. Sure, we all know that Spider-Man and Green Lantern were selling reasonably well, but just how small were the print runs for Weird War, Night Nurse, or Dudley Do-Right? The search for Marvel Spotlight #2 in high grade is leading the way, followed closely by Ghosts #1 and Sinister House Of Secret Love. What will be next book to find collector favor? Pre-hero Marvel reprints, Saturday morning cartoon series by Gold Key, and 20¢ Captain America's, Daredevils, and Thor's are gaining in popularity. Batman and Detective in high grade is also growing in demand.

Sales: Action #440 NM $9; All Star Western #11 NM $110; Avengers #83 NM $20; Daredevil #81 NM $18, #158 NM $75; Supergirl #1 NM $16; Spectacular Spider-Man #27 VF/NM $22; Combat Kelly #1 VF $12; Marvel Two In One #1 VF++ $25; Iron Fist #1 NM $38; Amazing Spider-Man #122 NM $148; Demon #1 VF/NM $32; Charlton Bullseye #1 NM $18; Underdog #1 (2ND) NM $58; Vampirella 1972 Annual VF $185; Superfriends #1 NM $15; Monsters Unleashed #1 $18; Ringo Kid #1 NM $15; Invaders #1 NM $15

As I canvas monthly price and sales information from stores, mail order dealers, I also like to discuss the current outlook on the market and who are presently the primary sources for books. Surprisingly, I've run across quite a few collectors That don't utilize mail order dealers for one reason or another. Some aren't sure how to start, how to overcome the rumors\truths of mail order, or how to get more comfortable sending large dollar amounts through the mail. Something should be done to bring these collectors into the fold. perhaps more CBM articles reviewing general mail order guidelines. (Page 33 in the Grading Guide is also useful.)

Also noteworthy... collectors often have a distinctively different point-of-view from most dealers, especially about the overall state of the market. For example, a dealer has quite a bit of overstock in one area that is slow to sell. They conclude that the market is slow, but actually collectors have only temporarily shifted their collecting interest. Collectors are STILL INTERESTED in comics and their spending dollars keep piling up, waiting for the next find!

Thanks for reading and see you in the next issue of CBM! ■

MARKET REPORTS

GREG WHITE

COMIC BOOKS & COLLECTIBLES
Kissimee, Florida

Welcome to a hot and wet Central Florida. The rain does little to promote business, hopefully the hot summer will bring many tourists sales. The month of May was slow. New product is a steady seller but nothing like a few years ago. Back issues are still in a sales funk. Both store sales and mail order have been quiet in recent weeks. We continue to purchase more Golden age and Silver age comics than we are selling at the moment. I have no problem with stockpiling quality pre-1965 books. The steady sales will return in time.

SILVER AGE (1956-1969)

We recently purchased large groups of DC, Gold Key, and Charlton. This includes long runs of Mystery in Space, Strange Adventures, Star Trek, and Ditko sci-fi. The question I have is "where are the Marvel collections from 1962-1968?" Nothing terrific has come in recently. We need to restock on most popular Marvel titles from that period. Sales in this area were slow during May, but that is likely to change during the upcoming summer season. Just this week I bought four key Silver Age DC books and don't expect them to last long.

Recent Sales: Star Trek #1 VG $80; House of Secrets #92 FN $125; Time Tunnel #1 NM $25; Tales To Astonish #35 VG $150.

GOLDEN AGE (1935-1955)

We have been spending lots of bucks on old books lately. One purchase brought a nice run of early Batman comics, another pay

out fetched Fiction House, and yet a third enabled us to restock on lower grade mid-1940's books. Sales have been so-so. Important books will sell but many of the second tier titles that are in below very fine condition (isn't that most of them?) sit even when priced 20-25% below guide. Convention sales on these books have been soft also. I am also concerned that we are losing long time collectors who are frustrated with the continual spiral of prices. Who the heck is buying all those books at such lofty levels? Let us hope this hobby does not become solely a rich mans toy. Think about it!

Recent Sales: Batman #7 GD $400; Four Color #159 VG $95; Submariner #4 VG $500.

TOYS, ORIGINAL ARTWORK, & DISNEYANA

We purchased a large group of Disney artwork that includes limited edition cels, lithos, and prints. It will be interesting to see how strong the market is in this area. Last week we purchased another Peanuts original Sunday page and a great group of Frazetta originals.... including comic book pages and strip art. Thankfully this kind of material is not offered to the store every month, or I would be broke! A nice Mickey Mouse wooden/tin toy (1940's) came in yesterday along with a group of BLBs and Fast Action Books. I wish I saw more of that kind of material during the course of the year.

Recent Sales: Donald Duck tin xylophone mint-in-box $175; Captain Action Aquaman costume, loose $150; Mickey Mouse animation drawing (1947) $95.

That will wrap it up this month. Enjoy the summer cons! See you soon!

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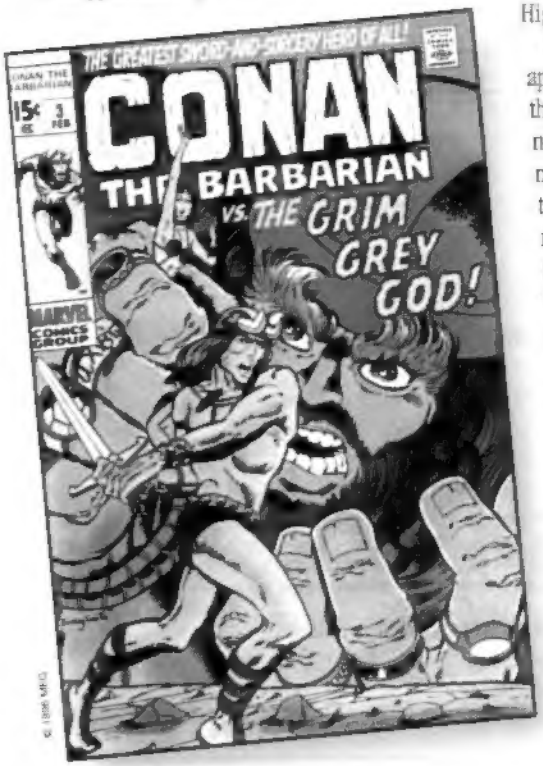
SPEAK OUT! GUEST EDITORIAL

Continued from page 21

Holdings" in early 1973 when Bruce Hershenson and Ron Barlow contacted us about whether or not we wanted to buy case lots of Conan #1, 2, and 4. There were no 3's. Seems there were well over 25,000 copies each of Conan #1, 2, and 4 on up, but no 3's. The people with this warehouse full of comics had "forgotten" to acquire any.

I distinctly remember their price on a case of 300 Conan #1s started out at $600. In other words, $2 a copy. We bought 5 cases at this price at the rate of a case a month. We were selling them NM/M for $5 each, five for $20. After a while, wholesale from "Tony" went to $900 a case. We only popped for a couple cases at this price point. When it went up to $1200 a case ($4 a book) we balked at the price and that was the last I ever remember personally purchasing from those particular holdings. At that point, I had developed my own flow(s) of newer books by buying large lots of them as they were published and no longer needed to tap into books from the East coast.

Now Conan #2 started out at $300 a case lot of 300 copies. I do not remember if the price ever went up on those or not by the time we stopped making purchases. There were no 3's. The only reason #3 is listed "scarce" in the Overstreet Guide was because "Tony" didn't buy any. Pure and simple.



Conan #4s, etc. were 50¢ but by that point many people were buying large lots of what used to be the Number One selling comic book in our stores. This also explains why early Conan comic books (except for #3) are relatively common in higher grades compared to other comics of the same period.

There were many of us buying out of the "Mafia Comics Holdings" starting around 25 years ago. The Koch brothers in partnership with Gary Dolgoff made large purchases through the years as did other individuals that were approached such as early comics dealer Richard Alf from San Diego. Some where in the mid 1970s, this ten year old operation was curtailed and the remaining books sat for another ten years.

To make a potentially long story shorter here: in the early 80's Chuck Rozanski of Denver's Mile High Comics bought the remnants of a major holdings of these type of books that took six semi-truck loads to haul amounting to over 2 million comic books from some of these same people which became what he calls "Mile High Two."

Conrad Eschenberg told me he was approached to buy out of a 7th truck at the same point in time that Chuck never had a chance to see. Conrad only made the connection after he and I talked about this on the phone one night. There is much more depth to this whole twenty year story, but one will most likely have to wait for me to finish my book to read the rest.

Chuck R. told me recently that "before I bought the 'Mile High II' deal from Barry Brown, I first checked with Marvel Publishing VP Michael Hobson as to the propriety of buying the books. This seemed most logical, as most of the books were Marvels. I asked him if he thought Marvel would object to me buying books that were seemingly 'affidavit returns.' His response was (in effect) 'hell no, why would we care after all this time?' His argument was that since the books were all at least 10 years old at the time (1985), Marvel had no way of establishing an ownership trail and thus didn't care. It was only after receiving this assurance that I agreed to buy the books.

Chuck continued "Another interesting note is that I was offered the deal after all the traditional East Coast (large) dealers either passed, or tried to "lowball" Barry at a pittance. I had never bought from Barry previously, as I objected to the concept of trading in 'affidavit returns.' I knew some of my mail order competitors were getting rich buying these books, but I had a hard time with the concept. So I let them have a strategic advantage over me for many years.

"What finally made me decide to buy the books were the following realizations: a) The publishers seemingly didn't care about books from 10 years previous. b) This was a one-time deal that would end a strategic advantage for (some of) my competitors. c) Barry Brown claimed that if I didn't buy the books from him that he would break the deal up into many smaller lots and 'flood' the entire East Coast with these older books. This would have caused great harm to my existing mail order operation.

"I think it can therefore be said in all candor that I entered into my dealings with Barry Brown with very mixed emotions. Had I not feared his threat to flood the market, I probably would not have done the deal. But, having done it, I must admit that I'm glad I did. To this day I hear that some of the dealers in 'affidavit returns' curse my name for having 'stolen' this deal from them. That makes me happy indeed."

So there you have a "reader's digest" view of why a book such as Conan #3 did not have "low distribution" as the more common myth would want us all to believe. This is a partial version of the larger story that will appear in my forth-coming tome to the business of comic books called "Comic Book Store Wars" to be published in 1997. ■

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